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NO BRIDGE TO HEAVEN

By the same Authors
A MILLION DIED !

NO SPAGHETTI FOR BREAKFAST
(Alfred Wagg and David Brown)

NO BRIDGE TO HEAVEN

A Novel by

ALFRED WAGG AND VALERIE WAGG

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DEDICATION

To the flyers and ground personnel
of the 8th U.S.A.A.F.

PROLOGUE



JUNE'S a funny month. It always seems to divide things. Winter from Summer. Softening from Invasion. Spring from something else. But then I never could understand Spring. Speaking of winter and summer—much more happened back last December. There were sticky Christmas candy, gunnery school, a bunch of really tough missions and New Year's on our Liberator base. Sober, of course! It was muddy and flavoured with a lot of guys' half-witted ideas about winning the war. But most of all I guess I remember dampness, cheese, fog, stale crackers, red-faced women, pubs, wild wet winds, terrible whiskey and England! December and England—that memory still haunts me like spring onions and yesterday's Spam.

Every decent day we flew. Between times we mostly sopped up cheap beer. It was tougher getting lost and wandering over Happy Valley. You

know, navigators get lost just like ordinary people. But then, I do myself.

I remember that first greeting. They had dumped me out of a jeep onto an airfield "Somewhere in England." It all started right then. My story of Pappy and Dave, I mean. "Take your shoes off. Make yourself at home. For Christ's sake, get comfortable. Everybody gets that way around here sooner or later. Sure, stay as long as you like. You might as well enjoy our adolescent kingdom."

That was my introduction to Pappy Adams and Dave Brownrigg. They're dead for keeps now. An uncompromising thought. I took my shoes off, and the truth is I think I stayed too long. It was that infernal noise that got me. What? You haven't heard a squawk box? You haven't heard a loud speaker pump noise? A squawk box hangs inside every Nissen hut, every mess, every hangar, every dispersal area around the perimeter. That contraption some sophisticated gents prefer to call the Tannoy.

Our hut was the same as hundreds more—one of those rumpled up iron cylindrical concoctions we call home on the wrong side of the Atlantic. One of those places God hadn't got around to blessing yet, and Mother—thank God—hasn't seen.

The squawk box set the tempo. It always churned the air with harsh loud noise. You think I'm crazy—nuts—gone haywire. I don't really think so. I

just lived around there. You think I should be in the "foolish factory" too. Well, that's one man's opinion. If you'll just listen, I'll tell you my story.

What will your son be like when he comes home? Well, I really can't say. Things are mighty different over here. That is, a fellow's thinking! But his thinking isn't the only thing that's different. Fellows tell jokes that seem pretty raw, foul and ugly to you. Ugly words or stories often give necessary color to life. The trouble is, of course, that the color sometimes is black—unless those word stories reflect utter naturalness. If they reflect human virtues and shortcomings, they become really great.

I suppose you'll get used to the tales someday. Do you want to hear my story? Well, all right, but remember you asked for it.

Where have I been? You mean before I came to England? Well, I've been around. I'm a sort of free-wheeling version of Marco Polo, Napoleon and Martha Raye. You know, I'm somebody who likes variety. I've been almost everywhere—China, Burma, South Africa, North Africa, the Middle East and generally throughout the betel-nut spitting domain of India.

Oh yes, I was in South America, too, once. Used to mother a lot of helpless refugees. A "friend" got me the job. Yes, I was with the Navy too. Which navy? Oh, I was with the British, the American and a couple of other navies. I was on a Dutch

submarine in the Far East once. We sunk four Jap transports and then stayed drunk for nearly three months celebrating. Ever drink Bols gin? No? Well, it's pretty hot stuff, but no worse than the whiskey on the airbase I'm going to tell you about.

Yes, our base was strictly Liberators, but over here you get to know everybody. I lived on a Fortress base, too. Are they any different? You betcha they're different. As different as you could imagine. Personalities tend to be shaped by the kind of ship a man flies. But let me tell you my story. It's pretty confused, but perhaps you'll understand the thinking over here if you'll just listen.

CHAPTER I

"Attention please. Attention please. It is now five o'clock—blackout time. Check all blackouts please. Repeat. It is now blackout time. Check all blackouts please. Over."

Outside, long slices of black cloud are folding over the sky—a grey dismal sky—a cold December sky.

Inside, Captain Ralph Stevens throws down his bridge hand and reluctantly draws the blackout curtains across the window. Almost as if talking to himself rather than to the three other officers at the bridge table, "Stevie" begins saying things.

"You know, Heaven's a long way from the end of your pencil—especially if you have to mother a lot of guys who push Liberators across this English Channel. Ever tried cheering up a corpse? Well, it's worse than that. Many's the time you get in the middle of an argument—then the damned guy don't come back.

"That gets me to what I started to say. I wonder where the hell Pappy Adams is? He's due back for a party."

For several minutes nobody opened his trap. Stevie studiously paced the floor. He would—always was as nervous as a cat. If a crew didn't come back after a raid—well, it was pretty sure they were lost—even Stevie's best friend, the flight surgeon, Ike, could figure that one out.

"Isolationist Ike," we called him. With U.S.

captain's bars up, Ike looked at things differently from Stevie. Ike was from Ohio, the Middle West. Stevie had spent his life commuting between Singapore, Hong Kong, Paris and the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Now, at forty, they both considered themselves old.

The base seemed to be more of a non-grandfather's league than anything else. Nearly all the gang were Class "A" youngsters. Even the missing Pappy Adams, pilot of the Liberator 'Flak Alley,' five missions completed, a husband, father of twins, was just twenty-two to-day. Pappy hadn't seen his twins. He'd been spending too much time running around the top floor of Germany.

Those December to June days seemed as if they were only yesterday, and they were only yesterday. D-Day wasn't so very long ago, and London hadn't changed much. It all sort of gets on your nerves. The beer still tastes the same, looks the same and costs the same. And you can't see Normandy from Piccadilly.

That night last December, Stevie had planned to celebrate Pappy's birthday right after chow. It was almost supper time, but still no Pappy.

Stevie had two bottles of whiskey—an incentive for an old-time bull session like they used to have at training camp. Those good old times seemed long ago. Six months before was almost beyond recall.

So much had happened since the group left that jumping off spot, Rapid City. Why Rapid City had been chosen by the Air Force as a training

depot not even Stevie could figure out. But you can't map an official mind.

Stevie said he thought of Rapid City as one of those strange places in the world where people went to hide in—to disappear into—when they had married their cook or committed some other socially disgraceful act. Certainly not the correct place to get friendly with guys you might have to live with the rest of your unnatural life—that is, of course, if things were as bad as newspapers made out they were.

Stevie said Rapid City was a first class backwater. Broncho-busting, Wild West—and all that sort of thing. You never went to Rapid City *en route* from New York to Los Angeles by the night plane—anything between Los Angeles and New York was a curious, strange, unknown land, annoying land that made nice places seem farther away.

But despite all this, Stevie came to enjoy Rapid City. He and Ike were only lieutenants then. Both of them had left their businesses—both prosperous businesses—to get the war over with.

Ike was a small-town medic, a general practitioner, and Stevie was a big-town stockbroker who really could sell stocks and bonds. Big, fat, piggish gold letters on a rippled glass door in Wall Street told the story with one exception: Stevie did not intend to die in Wall Street. No one who worked in Wall Street ever intended to die there—not if he could help it. Well, “the Street” certainly was not Stevie's idea of heaven. No one ever thought of

heaven's being decorated with ticker tape and stock quotations. Nearly everyone dreamed of retiring and moving out into the country. They wanted to become scientific farmers when they could afford it!

Ike simply wanted to die as a G.P. Being a physician, he wanted the dignity of grey hair, a black leather seat and a small-town practice that insured mild success. He certainly ought to be able to die in his profession and be happy.

Cattlemen usually think of heaven as bigger and better grazing lands; Stevie envied fishermen who figured heaven as a quiet pool of water fringed with elms or some kind of trees that grew tall and green. Stevie said you could not think of heaven as bigger and better Wall Streets or quiet pools of water, but in heaven, Stevie visualised, there *would* be a change. You know, different people, different faces—heaven would be some place absolutely wonderful!

This war had a decided effect on Stevie. He had delayed his plans about heaven on earth. The very first day of the war he literally leaped out of his grey slacks to join the Air Forces.

When the brand new lieutenants arrived at Rapid City, they were strangers of the sort that only Americans can be. Americans really can get that way—it's not very long between civil wars. A lot of States don't play too many games with each other. For instances, there's the South *versus* the North, the East *versus* the West, Florida *versus* California, and Texas—God bless her—agin' any and all comers! You don't think so? Well you ought to get off

your backside and get around more. See life, my friend !

Now, in England, still almost as strange as on that first day in Rapid City, these guys were partners in a job that was making them older and greyer and fast.

Ike was laconic and slow to speak. You know, typical flesh and soul of the physician. He always thought inside himself. It was safer that way. No lawsuits for him. But Stevie liked to talk out loud in the open. The more open the better. If people talked out loud they advertised, they said things. If people said things, you knew who they were, or how much money they had. Perhaps you could sell them just a little stock. Every little deal helped Stevie's sales totals. Only fools talked in front of Stevie when he was selling stock.

"Attention all personnel. Attention all personnel. Tomorrow, Wednesday, there will be a gas-mask drill from 0900 to 1000 hours. All personnel will wear gas masks. Over."

The Tannoy seemed to go on and on. It was simply part of a new life. This new life meant living in low, squashed buildings that spread about the countryside like so much butter ; and using latrines that looked and smelled just like the home-town swimming pool.

The squawk box meant more to flying personnel than to anyone else. Any day before a raid an announcement over the squawk box calling names of crews to fly would precipitate a heavy hush over the

lounge rooms and GI billets. But the crews came and went with little change of expression while the luckier stay-at-homes sighed softly.

Ike sat half twisted in his chair. He half puffed, half chewed a cigarette. Joe, Stevie's partner and another hut-mate, pushed his chair back from the card table. No one was anxious to continue playing cards. In the back of their minds were thoughts of Pappy.

Joe picked up a banjo and began fingering the chords of a Czechoslovakian folk song. Joe was a Czech. Born Czech, but reared in that good old American corn-fed tradition. Joe understood Ike's ways more than Stevie's.

All the talk about isolationism, anti-British, anti-American, anti-anything and everything confused him no end. Joe always seemed to listen, and obviously did a lot of thinking; to him Americans were isolationists in a broad and wide fairyland—the British seemed just isolationists between themselves. He liked reading history better.

Joe was from Minnesota. He was, so to speak, a Mid-Westerner too. Joe played the banjo well. Once he'd played in a big-time band back in the States. He could play anything if you could just hum the tune. Besides, playing gave Joe something to do. He was afraid to talk too much. His real job was to go back to the Balkans and on to Czechoslovakia. Or, at least, going back to Czechoslovakia was his first job. He enlisted for that! His second job was to get back to Mamma in

Minnesota. Anyway, Joe was just a first lieutenant.

Mamma in Minnesota is one of the greatest handicaps to our Air Forces abroad. She's the reason most guys are in a rush to get home. Maybe even the British would understand us a little better if they knew Mamma in Minnesota. Mammams in Minnesota never take war for granted like a lot of folks do over here. You might call Mamma a non-common denominator.

"Attention all personnel. Attention all personnel. All officers will return 45-calibre pistols to the Ordnance Officer at once. Over."

The squawk box clicked off. In a second, it had been switched back on again. A whispering voice chanted sarcastically.

"I know a secret. I know a secret. Somebody shot the tires off the C.O.'s jeep. Who shot the tires off the C.O.'s jeep. I know a secret."

Then the voice faded out.

"Looks like somebody's been a destructive little boy," said 'Wheats.' "The pistol-packing papas from the aviation yard have 'had it.'"

Wheats was the fourth at the card table. He had been squeezed out of college into the Air Forces. He was the youngest of the intelligence officers. The youngster was not exactly a shiny-button kind of guy, but certainly deserving of that title "eager beaver." Maybe rich boy, maybe not. You couldn't tell exactly, but certainly the type, canned in Boston, sold for life to the suburbs!

In any event, in this set-up Lieutenant John Oscar Wilson 3rd was for the most part a bystander.

His main usefulness was to make remarks which brought forth unceasing comment from Stevie, the principal grandfather. Stevie really needed that youngster—he made an excellent stooge.

It was Stevie who renamed Wilson “Wheats.” It seemed a fitting handle for one who had an over enthusiasm for sentiment, breakfast cereals and work. It was Wheats who ended the temporary silence.

“At my college, we didn’t wait for dead people to walk home. How’s about opening one of your precious little bottles, Stevie? Joe pinched a couple of oranges. Oranges and whiskey ought to taste pretty good right now.”

Stevie turned, stood stock still and stared him in the face.

“Quack, quack, quack, quack. Just like a duck. All day you’ve been yammering out of turn. Listen, Wheats. How long has it been since you arrived? Three bloody days. I suppose you think that’s long enough to find out everything there is to know on this base. You headquarters characters that descend from London give me a pain in my backside—smart cracks—smart alecs—all wised up on forms—mostly feminine—and not even a scratch of hog and hominy sense about men. Joe got those oranges for Pappy’s birthday party. For God’s sake sit down and shut up. Relax.”

One of the things that puzzled me was how mean-talkin’ fellows can be towards one another. You’d nearly think there was to be a killing. Then, after three drinks, those same “khaki carriers” were

weeping on each other's shoulders. Perhaps it's the conflict of pride and fear precipitated by just being plain tired.

Trying to be rational, Ike put in :

"Wheats, get T.G. on the phone at Operations, and find out if there's any news about Pappy."

T.G. lived in a hut across the road, when he was off duty. More likely, though, you'd find him fastened to the bar in the Officer's Club. Ike and Stevie didn't like the club bar—no seclusion.

T.G. was from Pennsylvania, just next door to Ike's State. Next door to Stevie's, too. Really, he filled the gap between them, both mentally and geographically. He was a house master at a fancy boys' school before he joined up and became a lieutenant in the Intelligence section of the Air Forces. The one thing that seemed appealing to T.G. about the Air Forces was that you didn't have to watch every blessed word you spoke. Not like it was back at his school—where a man couldn't cuss, or even smell like a man.

His favourite swear word was "piss pot." It brought back memories of Rapid City. Glorious pots with pink flowers—the very thought made him burst into laughter. T.G. had always believed pots passed out of use when grandfather stored his cavalry sword in the attic. Besides his swear word, his secret passion was to punch a guy in the nose—any guy. He always said it was because he had become so bored with headmasters.

"Come on, Wheats. Don't be so confounded

lazy. Get on that 'phone and find out if there's been a report on Pappy. Maybe he's landed at another field." Ike was trying to prod Wheats into action. Then, turning from Wheats to Stevie, Ike began again. His words came off the very bottom of his thoughts. Poor Stevie, Ike mused, was, to say the least, not in a quiet mood.

"Stevie, about that trip to-day. You know, we haven't been over that Ruhr in a long time. Why these kids call it 'Happy Valley' is beyond me."

"I guess if we had been sitting up there with our faces shoved into a rubber hose and had to watch that sun-flowering flak that pops up to about 20,000 feet and then puffs in your face, we'd get sarcastic, too. Incidentally, Ike, why didn't you wake me this morning?"

Ike pushed words back at Stevie in his staccato voice.

"I didn't wake you at three o'clock. No use getting you out of your sack. And such a sleeping beauty you were! Anyway, Wheats and I were on duty. Mostly the usual routine—nothing new—routes, crews, orders. The same old 'poop.' Since then I don't know any more than you do. I stopped by the Combat Mess a few minutes ago to get some cigarettes and picked up a little tongue-talk. Evidently several crews ran short of gas and couldn't make it home. One of the boys said they missed the target and then went cruising around Germany for about an hour before spotting a secondary target."

"What I don't understand," Stevie said stiffly,

"is why that guy Adams didn't take enough gas. After all, he's been flying long enough to know that getting lost is no novelty around here. Extra gas is the best 'mad money' in the world."

"Anyway, like I was saying before I was interrupted, it seems the other groups evidently turned round and came home when they couldn't find that factory. How Colonel Mac hates to bring his bombs back! He's a good Joe, but he's sure stubborn."

"It must have taken a generous helping of guts to stick around and say in effect, 'come on up and get us'—just like old times—no fighter cover—and knowing that everybody in Germany was looking at you."

"Even if we just wander around in the sky over Germany, it still does a helluva lot of good. Think of all the people that stop work. Nice idea, don't you think, Stevie?"

Stevie conveniently mumbled, "Yeah." Joe, sitting on the other side of the room, was singing to himself as he played—paying little or no attention to the world at large.

"Attention all personnel. Attention all personnel. There will be a moving show this evening at the Red Cross Club. The picture is 'Air Force.' Repeat. The picture 'Air Force' will be shown this evening at the Red Cross Club. Over."

In a depressingly cheery voice Wheats carried the conversation after the announcement had fallen on half a dozen deaf ears.

"Pretty swell picture, that. They're really

fighting a war out in the Pacific. Guns and everything! Guess I'll take in the show. How about you guys?"

Stevie didn't even bother to answer Wheats, but said to Ike, "You know, you'd really think people at home believed the only war we are fighting is in the Pacific. I suppose we're here just to ease Anglo-American relations!"

Mentally, Ike never admitted any such interruptions. He went on as if nothing had happened. Just as if pork was pork and beans were fruit.

"To my way of thinking, the Germans would breathe a lot easier if we always found our targets and came right home again."

Ike was hitting his stride. In a way it was fun. It wasn't often he could keep up with Stevie—especially in talking. He could feel his hands getting a good grip around his courage.

Ike must have been trying to talk himself into believing his own thoughts, for he continued, "You know, flying in a new place isn't always so bad, especially if you bust the hell outta something worth while. Think I'll waddle down to the Photo Lab later and have a squint at the pictures. I've got a hunch they dropped their sticks on a chemical factory just outside of Cologne. Probably Pappy, after cruising around and around, ran out of gas and 'ditched' on the way home. Anyhow, Stevie, cheer up—he'll be back 'fore too long."

"What's 'ditching,' Ike?" Wheats always had to ask silly questions and prove conclusively that

he was a numbskull, a greenhorn or a something or other.

Ike placed his feet in a more comfortable position on the bridge table. Like all big shots, he would take his time in answering. Then, in a benevolent "padre" attitude, he descended from trying to figure out where the hell Adams and his crew had gone to the more tedious explanation of the obvious.

It all reminded him of old times at home—only now the situation was reversed, *he* was the old man handing down advice instead of a ham-sandwich-eating interne. He didn't struggle so hard for a living these days. No more coke or drugstore lunches for him. In a way, Ike relished it all. He was going to be a G.P. and the kids were just his meat. Of course, Stevie didn't count in those thoughts.

"The other day Dick Hruby did a real ditching job. He caught hell over Berlin, and a couple of engines were knocked out. He made it back over the enemy coast okay, but was losing altitude fast. He was going to have to set his Liberator down in the 'drink.' Everybody in the ship was tossing things over the side—flak suits, ammunition, everything that was loose. But it was no help. That Lib was through. At a couple of hundred feet, all the crew was on the flight deck, braced for a rough jolt.

"Hruby came down as if he were hitting the main runway. After they felt the first impact, everyone got ready for the second, and worse one, that they always had been told would come. There never

was a second. Hruby's co-pilot claims the landing was better than any they had ever made on land. That might explain why the ship floated for almost fifteen minutes.

"As it was, they didn't have too much time. Water rushed into the ship, and by the time everyone was out but Hruby and the co-pilot, they had only a few inches of air for breathing space. The dinghys were knocked out. The only one that they could use would just partially inflate. The bombardier rode that, and the rest of the crew all held on to the sides.

"Hruby had a pair of twins on board—his waist gunners. One of them was so intent on holding on to the emergency radio equipment that he didn't take it to the dinghy and was carried off down sea. The water was very cold. They knew the one twin was done for unless help came quick, and if one went down the other would give up. It almost killed the other twin to watch the brother being carried away. Everybody kept shouting.

"Finally a British trawler that saw the Lib crash, picked them up. It was the first time a whole Lib crew came out of a ditching alive.

"Hruby's bombardier came out with one of the best cracks of the war. He was sitting on the wing just before the Lib sunk. The trawler that later picked them up wasn't in sight yet. In fact there was nothing on the skyline but lots of ice cold water. He looked around for a couple of seconds and shook his head. 'The rough thing about this is,' he said, 'I've never yet slept with a woman.' "

“ How about that 'phone call, Wheats ? ”

Wheats, apparently satisfied with the dust-off, moved over to the 'phone. The gadget was one of those queer U.S. Signal Corps field telephones, cased in bright yellow pigskin with bulky brass fittings.

Wheats ground the handle and squatted, folding his legs under him to wait patiently for the operator to answer. Switchboard GI's generally pass the time of day shooting craps, or reading Wild West pulps. You can't break up a dice game for a telephone call. Especially if the sergeant is winning pounds. After all, pounds are worth much more than dollars. Four times as much, somebody said.

A large black fly glided down to a safe landing on the floor. Even the flies hung around all winter and were getting fat on Army rations. Too many crumbs off the cackleberries. Fresh hen eggs were more popular with those pet flies than with anybody else. Cackleberries for breakfast probably meant going to Germany, and Germany, despite what U.S. politicians were telling the public, wasn't a popular place to go.

Wheats slipped off one of his heavy overshoes, hardly recognizable for eternal winter mud. He reached out and bounced it off the overstuffed fly. His self-satisfied state was broken only by the 'phone buzzer. Wheats must have thought it was the call through to Operations, for he grabbed the receiver and wise cracked :

“ This is the United States Army Enlistment Service, Broadway and 40th Street Branch. You are

needed in the Army. Calling all men. Calling all men. Over."

"For God's sake quit clowning, Wheats," roared Stevie. "Who is it?"

"It's Marianne. You know, a delicate cow dressed in blue—Red Cross forever—love for sale at 28. Well, it's her, and she's bellowing. She wants you, Stevie, dear."

As usual Wheats was more emphatic than accurate in his description of Marianne. His uni-dimensional caricature of Marianne forgot the part of her that volunteered—after all she was not drafted—for the Red Cross; forgot that she, too, went through the daily rigors of eating, sleeping, drinking, living the strain that was not only doled out to airmen. Possibly this strain had changed Marianne since she came over. Perhaps it was the strain of managing the Aero-club, perhaps not. Perhaps the whole business of war was more than Marianne bargained for. It was certain that Wheats had found a weakness in her and, like all humanity that attacks weakness, he had unconsciously nurtured his vengeance.

Perhaps all this strain, all this newness, all this war, had worked to the end that Marianne had drunk too much, trying to keep up with something she didn't understand. Perhaps that is why she appeared as she did to Wheats.

Wheats tossed over the receiver and Stevie caught it in mid air.

"Yeah, Marianne, what do you want?"

On the other end of the line, a feminine voice snapped back.

"Where is Dave, Stevie? Is he with you?"

"Haven't seen him."

But Marianne would not be put off.

"Stevie, I thought you were Dave's and Pappy's friend. So Dave's refused to fly with Pappy to-day and he'll probably catch all kinds of trouble. And do you know where he is—or give a damn? No. You're absolutely wicked, Stevie; you're wicked. You're just rotten like all those conceited intelligence officers." Marianne's voice was trembling with rage as she violently shook out her words.

Stevie covered the mouthpiece with his hand and led his chin over towards Ike in a physical attempt to avoid Marianne's attack.

"Marianne's hot under the collar. She's heard Dave refused to fly, and she's raising hell a plenty. She knows Adams' co-pilot was replaced this morning."

But Marianne was rambling on.

"A couple of guys just came in the Club and told me all about it."

"About what?"

"You fool—about Dave, of course," said Marianne.

"What about Dave?"

"Are you trying to be funny? This isn't Wall Street, big shot. Do I have to draw maps with road signs for you? He's going to be court-martialled, isn't he?"

Then, as if Ike had heard the whole conversation, he got up and, scowling fiercely, motioned to Stevie.

"For Christ's sake, Stevie, tell her to mind her own damned business. Hang up. Tell her it's nice that her boy-friend quit early. He'll have a lovely trip home. Lots of sea. Maybe we can arrange a special boat. Go on, Stevie, hang it up. Hang it up."

Ike walked over closer to Stevie so he could be overheard by Marianne.

"These Red Cross gals get on my nanny, anyhow. Half the trouble with that pimpled dame is, she's a nerve menace."

Stevie quickly let the receiver drop from his fingertips into its case. After carefully brushing his hands on his pants, he said to Ike :

"My dear friend, I'm afraid that's not the last we've heard from Marianne. The first shot has been fired, the battle flag is rising ! "

CHAPTER II

DAVE entered Marianne's room with the definite intention to have a row—to have it all out with her. He was restless. Her blasting, damning words that she hurled unmercifully smack into his face on the airstrip that morning still rung in his ears. He was momentarily paralysed. That short scene had added untold ugliness to his life. She had shouted and thinking back he could see every gesture she'd made. "Get out of that ship. I'm pregnant and you cannot leave me. Get down, get down or I'll tell everybody . . . get down."

He slammed the door behind him and called out in his lingering temper, "Marianne, Marianne, where the hell are you." He looked into the bath and the dressing room. There was no answer. She was out. Perhaps at the club. Surely if she had been visiting the other two girls who lived next door she would have heard and come in by now.

He sat down on an uncomfortable yellow wooden chair to wait. His face was singularly sullen. His eyes narrowed consciously as he attempted to concentrate trying to remember something hidden behind his hate. Then his tiring vision wandered away and around the room, stopping, focusing on a picture on Marianne's dressing table. He laughed disdainfully. The small photograph of himself in uniform wasn't very flattering. But in one corner he had written "To Marianne, From Your Guy."

"Your guy" was historic to Dave now. A few weeks before Dave carried the forebearing of the boy-aristocrat who at fifty is expected to be blessed with lots of silvery-grey hair—and his brown masses would, his father hoped, turn grey according to plan at a reasonably early age. Dave's tall figure would be expected under the same plan, to adorn plus-fours on the golf course back home. His blue eyes would just suit this respectable routine. Normally the perfect physical Dave could fill the bill but now as he sat there contorted in thought many tens of pounds were missing. His flesh had been watered in worry about so many things. His skin hung away from him like cheap burlap sacking.

He glared savagely at the picture for a while then threw it back onto the table. Sweet beginnings and fairly innocent too. But now? He wondered whether he had ever meant those words "Your Guy." There were other "Guys" around Marianne. She had ample variety. Bryan Wilkes for instance, got transferred last month. Marianne saw too much of him. Then he checked his thoughts and righteously told himself that he was not jealous. They had their fun. It was all part of being in England. Sky was the limit over here. No recriminations. Sure enough, Marianne could be honey-sweet if she felt in the mood. She knew how to cuddle and work her way into your arms and turn a lonely man's head and everybody got that way over here so there was plenty to keep her busy.

Dave brought his fists down onto the arms of the

chair so hard that they pained him and he was delighted. At least there was some reaction left. He wanted to be mad. He didn't want to compromise. Or did he? He beat his fists against the chair again and pain raced with his thoughts of shame but pain won. He was hurt that he was bested out of something he had wanted to do.

Spasmodically returning to more quiet thoughts he knew everything had changed during the last few days. She was no more a convenient mistress.

She had become insisting, demanding, nagging and hounding his every thought, even suggesting marriage. He laughed at first. Why not? He joked, and a joke it was that he should marry Marianne. She didn't want him to fly. She didn't like this and that. She behaved like Royalty and anyway they weren't married yet. He was in no mood to argue then. But now he would deal out what he wanted to say and be demanding too.

This morning when she spilled it right out loud that he'd have to marry her something inside him turned to ice and right then he knew a new unbounded anger. He could hear her words so plain. "I'm pregnant. I'm pregnant. Do you hear me? I'm pregnant."

Marianne's hysteria and shrieking right in front of his friends on the crew reminded him of his mother. She had run the same play acting in full routine to his displeasure so many times that Marianne had for a moment taken him back home where there had been no peace, no love really, and only doses of

unstable emotions had prepared him for becoming a man. He'd won that battle up till now. He'd tried so hard to do a decent job and keep his nose on the grindstone. But there had been those times when home kept annoying him, aggravating him. Now home had another ally against him.

Dave swayed slightly. He knew he'd been drinking since daylight after his "incident" with Marianne and he'd checked in his flying clothes and got his replacement. He was washed out of the mission on account of her. He didn't seem to be able to care about being court-martialled. He knew he was in for it but doubts and fears that centered on Marianne were gnawing at his conscience. He had never been a heel over anything and he'd even given way to his mother. But this time he wanted to be more difficult.

"I will have it out with her. I will, I swear I will," he mumbled.

It was late afternoon and the room was gradually getting darker. Dave sat motionless, not bothering to put on the light. Just then the outside door opened and in the open door's revealed twilight was framed the silhouette of Marianne.

"It's me, Dave" he growled.

Marianne hesitated, then came towards him without turning on the light.

"So I see" she began. "I've been wondering what happened to you, my darling." But even the calling of Dave darling sounded forced and insincere. Trying to cover the ill-effects of her own voice Claire rushed more words. "Nobody on the base seemed

to know where you had gone, since you didn't fly this morning."

Was her voice now changed from its note of insincerity to one who is triumphant? He stared back at her.

"So you've been spying and snooping again, have you?" Then getting up Dave lurched towards her, grabbing and twisting her wrists.

Marianne looked quickly into his face. Was he sober?

"Dave" her voice was soft and persuasive. "I'm very tired. I've had a hard day. Please let me go."

To Marianne's appeals Dave only tightened his grip. "I want to know where I am" he demanded incoherently. His legs were unsteady in his anger and excitement. Exhausting himself with emotion Dave was relaxing and she pushed him gently from her.

"Let me clean myself first, baby. Mix yourself a drink then we can have a nice talk." Marianne pulled off her gaberdine top-coat and was having trouble unfastening her work dress.

Marianne was a pretty brunette with a neat figure but her small, thin-lipped mouth and receding chin portrayed both weakness of character and hardness of manner. At this moment she just wanted to gain time. She followed Dave's nervous shifting from the corner of her eye.

Finally he planted himself in front of her. "Stop that awful, silly jabbering. I'm not going to be put off. You've got to tell me things. Well, go on talk,

damn you, talk " he commanded. " And what's more start talking now." Dave's temper had risen like never before. His body was filled with fever and uncontrolled determination. But he did not move to touch her. He only faced her with his hate.

" Oh, Dave my darling, please. I want to change into my dressing gown. Please let me go into the other room for a second."

" No " he snapped back almost barking at her.

Marianne tried to side step and evade him in an attempt to get into the far room but he wheeled round catching her hand and hauling her toward him. His hands cupped her shoulders and shaking her, Dave said between gritted teeth, " You've got to tell me, do you understand. Now. I'm going nuts if you don't tell me."

" You are hurting me Dave," Marianne whined. Then as if changing her tactics she collapsed against his chest and whispered demurely, " I'm so tired darling, let me take my things off and wash."

" To hell with you. I'm tired too, so what. I've been tired for months and now I get this on top of everything else. I'm going to know whether you're telling the truth." His eyes challenged as she fought to get free.

Marianne began crying and midst her sobbing went at Dave again.

" What do you mean coming here to attack me like a maniac? Let go you fool. Let go." But Dave was oblivious of her crying and her pleadings. He beat her arms and back with his open hands, and

for the seconds that were passing, was happy in his ravishing as if his thirst were at last being satisfied. They struggled and Marianne too became madly intoxicated by the fury and her emotions. Their hard breathing and crushing furniture were the only sounds. Marianne's dress had burst open and her straps and slip had slid from her shoulders. With her naked body in his hands Dave's senses illuminated a heathen desire and his expression changed. He picked her up and threw her, half-clothed, onto the bed. Glowering over her he tried to keep away, but it was impossible.

"You have not been true to me." But nothing he could say revoked his invitation. He tried again. "You terrible woman." He came closer and pinned her to the pillow with his arms. She had him reduced to nothing, to clay in her hand. He looked at her with simultaneous feelings of hatred and desire. How near at hand those opposites often are, and now, she was beneath him voluntarily helpless. As he leaned over her she kicked away the torn slip and dress acceding to her power over him as she spread herself to take her lover.

Now again as his ruler her mouth moved slowly, defiantly, as she brought him to her. "What do you want Dave?" she soothed and closed her eyes.

"You vixen," and his hungering dry lips found hers.

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It was completely dark. The two figures on the bed were lost in the blackness. December with its

wet winds only purred outside as night deepened. "Dave." Marianne was stroking his arms and legs preparing to wake him. "Dave darling, are you asleep?"

Dave did not answer. He lay there in the dark methodically dismembering thoughts that didn't make sense and his mind was pouring him out of a ladle into chaos. He could hardly keep his mind-thoughts inside his head. He wanted to rip open his head and clean it.

Then she had interrupted. Her warm body with its sweat from exercise smelled a little too human. He had forgotten why he had come and only the new madness surged forward again. He laid a hand on her leg to test his nausea and withdrew it as his nostrils were full of her. He pushed her away and sat up. She tried to draw him back to the wharf of her body but he would not come.

It had been as always with her—he was fired by his own desires to expend inward strength with her. It had become easy and a habit. She had cagerly helped him to form that habit. Now she was caging him with it. The hundred reasons of wrong presented themselves. This was happening after every affair lately. Now he was being driven out and away. Anywhere. He would walk a thousand miles. He would go and keep on going. He felt as if he were being driven before an uncivilized, tempestuous storm. The wind was clean and the rain was stinging him. With just his trousers and shoes on he rushed into the night.

Marianne did not try to understand for some time, Then she got up and dressed. "That queer duck. I'll fix his moods," she monologued and went out into that same night.

CHAPTER III

STEVIE sat down reluctantly in B.O.Q. dash 201 and sucked his lips. He looked around the room, but he was in a see-nothing mood. Ike knew a storm was brewing.

“What’s really wrong with Dave, Ike? Joe told me about his playing sick this morning, evidently something’s radically wrong. You’re the flight surgeon and the C.O.’s preliminary consultant—or investigating officer—on things like this. He generally does what you tell him to do. Obviously some fool’s been shooting his face off about a court-martial. You know how I feel about Dave. The point is, Ike, even if you don’t give him the works, he’s ‘had it.’ Talk won’t make a glamour boy out of him. For my part, I believe young Dave would make one of the best pilots this base has ever seen, but he’s gotta be handled right. He doesn’t lack moral fibre. He needs a rest, an overhaul, that’s all. Damn these court-martials anyhow, and damn that woman! Well, out with it, Ike. What is your super mind going to decree?”

“Take it easy, Stevie. I know how you feel about the regulations, and I as a doctor sometimes agree but we have to have discipline around the joint. No one in his right mind really wants to fly Liberators over Germany in daylight. Maybe I didn’t win wings in this war, but I think I know how the boys feel. I’ve lived with the combat crews from get-up time to dark. The boys all say those box formations

seem to move awfully slow. Too slow, when half the world beneath you is shooting at you. No wonder they get the jitters ; that's why I carry a bunch of pills to ease their nerves.

" You may take evasive action, but nevertheless you still go straight on through the flak. You lose the wing man, but you fly straight on. Then you do a slow roll over the target. It's like having your feet tied to a bedpost.

" Then you head for home. All the way back to the coast you can see them down below—shooting. Every time you see four eyes winking at you, you know it's not a sweet young thing in lace panties with teardrop breasts—it's those damned German gun batteries pin-pointing you in an angel's direction.

" Here's the deal, Stevie. You know damn well if we went soft around here and catered to every guy's little whims, and then everybody started to get sick at the same time, or refused to go on missions, we wouldn't get much done. Anyway, my idea is to have a club handy, but use a glove.

" The R.A.F. can ground a man and take him off flying, but in this man's Air Force it isn't done that way. Anyway, the R.A.F. needs ground staff almost as much as it needs pilots. If a guy volunteers to fly, he volunteers to fly and that's that. And if he refuses and he's not a case I can qualify as a medical case, well, you've got to have discipline—and discipline costs guys a lot. Discipline isn't just saluting—we all know that—it's the doing of the difficult things at the difficult times that it's all planned for.

The training, I mean. Therefore if our training doesn't make flyers of that breed it's not worth a goddam.

"In the first place, Stevie, you don't understand that if the Air Force Court takes a man's citizenship away from him—that is, if he's court-martialled and can't vote—it doesn't always mean they will execute that sentence. That's where the 'glove' part comes in. There's probation. Good behaviour helps. Ninety-nine out of a hundred go back and finish their missions."

Ike paused. Stevie butted in.

"But, Ike, you know that once you court-martial somebody and take his citizenship away, he's been branded with the goose egg, even if you don't carry through with the sentence. It's more that they get upset. They get nervous. That's all. They need a change when they're bad off. That's all being 'flak happy' is. That's supposed to be what those fancy rest homes are for. But no one seems ever to get there until it is too late. Anyway, who replaced Dave this morning?"

Ike flipped his cigarette into the GI stove, and turned back to Stevie.

"Operations put Coots up this morning. Coots arrived from the States with a whole crowd of replacements. Still a second lieutenant, but seems to be a likable sort. I'd say he's about nineteen or twenty."

"Never seen him," said Stevie; "Anyway I detest that word 'replacements.' The guy's probably like Wheats. Knows it all. Why don't they send us

plain guys—just hams ? It's the hams that make heroes, not those fresh guys. Anyway, if they have been wandering around the Ruhr to-day, this Coots will know a hell of a lot more when he gets back—if he gets back."

"Man bites man in latest version of total war," said Wheats, getting used to Stevie's brand of speechifying. Then, after his outburst, Wheats sat back again, waiting for the sergeant to ring through when the line was clear to Operations. Stevie subsided and threw himself into a chair.

The 'phone buzzer roused Wheats, who untangled his legs, stood up and answered.

"B.O.Q. dash 201—translated by request, means 'Bastard Officers' Quarters'."

On the other end of the line, T.G.'s voice echoed out of the earphone.

"What's cooking with you, chum ?"

"What's about Adams ? Has that 'Flak Alley' of his called in ? Stevie's getting all lathered up and beefing as usual," Wheats complained.

"Don't know anything definite yet. The control tower called a few minutes ago to say that Adams called in after he had passed over the Dutch coast. Tell Stevie he reported he had one motor cut out on him and his tail knocked to hell. He was playing Tail End Charlie again, and evidently he got flak hits. Said he had thirty minutes' gas left. The control tower believes he might make the English coast. Anyway, will call you back later."

"Rah-ger," droned Wheats. Rah-ger is our colloquialism that means Okay.

Wheats reported the conversation and, picking up his hat, slapped it on his head and walked out of the room. He had no more than closed the door when he shoved his head to say :

"Well, I've had it. Fine state of affairs—party's flopped, one guy's quit, a woman's on the warpath, and you all are incubating in B.O.Q. dash 201. I'm going to chow, dears. See you when I have to."

Stevie, to try to get his mind off Adams and his crew, picked up a London paper. Suddenly he tossed the paper aside and started talking again.

"D'you know Ike—newspapers, Senators, big people, little people—no one seems to understand our crews and what they think about. They never seem willing to face facts. They won't listen to the true picture of what the guys dream about, or even care what they think or dream. All they want is Snow White editions of results to cheer up the folks at home. For what? God-damned near time someone pepped up these kids.

"For instance, the mail situation. D'you know we are actually writing one-third more mail home than ever arrives here. We fight the war and we write the letters! Some deal. Who is this guy who says 'write more often.' He ought to do a little talking to the folks back home. That kind of guy bats his gums more than he ought to.

"A lot of times the boys come home from a raid just for mail. It sure is disappointing when there

isn't any. It seems silly to save your own neck, just to read mail—but, by God, they do, you know.

"Furthermore Ike, a couple more of those notices like the one that tail-gunner of Adams' got the other day, and it would be healthier for some people not to come home at all. You know young "Muscles" Cohen, Adams' tail-gunner? Well, he wrote some gal back home that he loved her. Then the first damned thing "Muscles" knew, she'd got a judge to marry her up to Cohen in absentia—by proxy, the papers called it. Evidently 'I loves you honey' was enough proxy for some old imbecilic judge. I guess old Cohen's got what you might diagnose as acute matrimonial indigestion, Ike."

Stevie stopped talking and picking up the paper started again in almost the same breath.

"Now just listen to this one, Ike. 'U.S. Liberator shot down *en route* from Africa to England;' and then their sub-title is what gets me. Think of it. It says, 'No Important Persons Aboard.' How about the pilot and his kids back home; and the crew and their wives, and they must've had kids, too? Not important, eh! Those dirty rats. Ike, it must have been some of the boys coming up to see us. I wonder if it's as tough down in Africa as it is up here?"

The door opened and closed. About every hour the same orderly, a full-blooded American Red Indian, plodded in and out of the barracks with the coal buckets. He was responsible for keeping the hut warm.

Joe, taking an interest in the proceedings, dropped his banjo across his knees and watched the Indian as he began to stoke the GI stove. The orderly finished his job and went into the sleeping room in the other end of the hut. Joe chided Stevie.

"Listen, Stevie, you're the bastard that's always bitching about no privates in the Air Force, and everybody getting to be colonels before they get to the ripe old age of 25. Now here's a real American Indian for you, and he's only a private. In fact this bird is only an orderly. That's two steps below a private."

Stevie began to cheer up. It was a change to talk about something else. For the first time for over an hour he began to smile. Joe was a nice guy. Anyhow, Stevie, in a high-pitched voice that seemed to sway in perfect cadence, answered.

"Joe, I'll tell you. It's this way. I still maintain there are no privates in the U.S. Air Corps. The trouble with this Chippewa is he can't speak enough English to ask anyone to give him his promotion. He only speaks about twenty words of pidgin English, poor bastard—that's the reason he's not a sergeant. He simply can't explain he's tired and unhappy just being a private."

A little fun never hurt. They both felt better.

The Chippewa had finished stoking up the fire in the other room, and he went outdoors to get more coal.


"Stevie, remind me to take my day off and teach that guy English."

The 'phone seemed to ring incessantly. This time Stevie took the call himself. It was T.G.—T.G. believed Adams' crew was one of the two crews that had crashed in the countryside about twenty miles away. Stevie dropped the 'phone and repeated the report.

"Stevie," said Joe, "come on. Let's chow before they're down to Spam."

As they climbed into their coats to leave, Stevie said to Ike :

"If T.G. calls, I'll be over at the Combat Mess. In the meantime, it might be a good idea if you started to figure out what you are going to do about Dave. I'll bring him around to finishing his missions if you can't. So help me, I will. I know his family back home. It would ruin his old man for life if he thought his kid was a quitter. See you later—but think it over."



CHAPTER IV

AFTER Stevie and Joe disappeared out of the door, Ike got up slowly and moved to a writing desk on which was a very large and black-faced typewriter. It was one of those old-fashioned kind that would hardly fit into a double bedroom. He slipped a piece of paper round the roller and began.

“To Commanding Officer.”

He wrote of the circumstances under which Dave had asked for a short rest from flying; then he concluded:

“After investigation, it is my recommendation that Second Lieutenant David Brownrigg, co-pilot of the B-24 ‘Flak Alley,’ be given two weeks’ rest from flying. I suggest duty as squadron censor effective immediately.”

Ike pulled the paper from the typewriter, signed it and then folded it carefully before sliding it into its envelope.

Leaning back in the chair, he counted out his thoughts. It had been a long time from lunch to supper. But every day was pretty much that way. Especially when the boys were scheduled to come home in the afternoon. Each day it was a similar routine—except that lately there had been fewer crews not coming back. That was encouraging.

You could almost tell how many Libs or Forts were coming back by the number of fighters that went out. It seemed that every day more fighters

went out, and more crews came back. The crews were the important thing. He thanked God separately for each additional fighter—they all helped. What they needed was a million more Mustangs.

Maybe Heaven wouldn't be such a long way from Stevie's pencil when they had more, and still more, fighters. As if blown by a freshening wind, his thoughts drifted over to Pappy Adams. This would be only Pappy's sixth raid. Quite a number more times Stevie would have to sweat out a friend's homecoming. It gets damn draining on your nerves waiting for 'returns.'

It seemed sort of foolish for I.O.'s or operation officers to make friends with pilots. It was part of his life as a flight surgeon, but not Stevie's lookout. The circumstances were constantly repeating themselves. When somebody who was just a name didn't come back, it didn't make any odds. Dead men weren't served with wakes around here. But if he was a pal, or even if you just knew him, well, it ground you down.

He got up and moved back to his chair. Pappy and Stevie's being close friends had started back in Rapid City, too. Stevie was tired of going to classrooms, and wanted to fly. So one sweet day Pappy took him flying. In fact, Pappy let him see the monument on the side of the mountain from the bottom looking up.

Soon after the flying expedition, Stevie and Ike had come to England. Pappy and his crew had stayed behind to complete their training. They had

been socalled latecomers to Rapid City. But even at that, Pappy's twins were born into this flaming world after Pappy took off and flew his classy Lib to England. Pretty tough for a mother not to have her old man around to officiate and trample over those nurses in the hallways. Who was to pass around that old cigar box, anyhow? Who would take the bows and tell 'em how she did it? War must have been a pretty filthy break for Mrs. Pappy!

Ike had never figured how wives back home fitted into the picture. It would certainly be as bad for her, if Pappy didn't turn up, as it was going to be for Stevie. Anyway, you had to pay for friends and relatives in this man's war, one way or another.

Between Stevie and him it was different. They were really the old dogs of the outfit, and had a kind of parental responsibility that brings you closer together. Their first C.O. had been killed on the group's third raid. Since then he and Stevie were the mainstays of the original gang. There weren't many left now. Fewer than a proper-sized handful. But you can't let tradition down. You couldn't let the guys down who had "gone on."

He and Stevie agreed Joe was a swell egg, but he was annoyed that Stevie didn't like Wheats. Wheats was a good enough guy. He'd learn. Seemed like Stevie had to pick on somebody. Probably he'd got so used to picking on secretaries in Wall Street that he couldn't stop it over here.

The main difficulty of the day was Dave. He'd recommended that Dave be put on mail censorship,

but what was Adams going to say about it all ? He'd have to talk to Pappy as soon as possible. Then there was that frightful woman, Marianne. She talked too much. She might ruin everything or anything. Stevie and he were men in a man's game. Dave was a partner, not a stake. Not flying was one of the things the C.O. had raised the most hell about.

He couldn't put Dave's case off onto Stevie. That wasn't a good enough excuse. And certainly it wouldn't be right to shake the blame on someone else for what you really felt and did yourself. As a physician he agreed with Stevie, but there was a feeling around this base that mental strain was the bunk.

Ike's thoughts shifted to the other boys who were missing from the day's raid. They were just as important as Adams' crew. Four other crews. One Lib—ten men. Four times ten. Forty guys. Of course, some of the newer Libs only carry nine but even four times nine is thirty-six. So far, since they came to England, just over a thousand ships had not come home, 10,000 men M.I.A. (missing in action). If it was only for them, Dave would have to fly again. Stevie would have to make good his promise, or Ike would give it to him—full blast. Stevie or no Stevie.

As for the others, he thought, "We lose 'em—we don't lose 'em. Then after their tour of missions we send 'em home if they're lucky." The whole sequence loomed up in front of him. "The kids come here and then, slap bang, they're in a new world. They

thought it would be glamorous, but 'it ain't at all.' They reach out for amenities, and what do they find? Damn little sometimes. What's cigarettes and candy going to do to help a set of rattling teeth? Flak makes you that way. Even God would surely forgive an odd case of jitters. Strong characters are more common in pulpits back home than in heavy bombers over Germany."

He could see the kids arriving in England with those new handbooks bought back in the States: "Learn about yourself and the war." Special pocket-size editions. "Find out all the answers for only ten cents." Sold at all bookstores—as if anybody who wrote handbooks knew anything but tales of half-baked heroes who went home to nestle close to the streamlined war effort.

Ike knew the answer to this base's problems was not to be found in cheap pamphlets. In fact, answers were based on things which damn few people dare talk about.

Anyhow, handbooks represented how "those people" far away might approach problems he was having. There was a lot of trash in handbooks. "How to figure your chances in three easy lessons." "Be a Personality in the Air." Second Edition, ten cents—standard prices prevail.

Even the Army Weekly had a story on mental breakdowns. They called it psycho-neurosis. They said it did not develop in guys who have a clear idea of the necessity for fighting the war. Whose necessity, did they say? Oh, that wasn't very clear. But

they did say what caused psycho-neurosis. They said it came from combat fatigue, combat danger, home troubles, fear of fear, lack of incentive, lack of confidence in command, physical discomfort, natural maladjustment, misplacement in service, or maybe just being overseas for a long time. How true. Did they realize what they were saying? They said that the causes would not bother you if you realized why you had to endure hardships. Well, why was it? Why was the world fighting a war anyway? No one had ever given him a real reason.

Ike slid further down in his chair, rubbing the fresh sweat from his forehead. It seemed worry was leaking out of every pore in his body.

Men and numbers always were confusing—the papers back home had kept saying, “As long as we don’t lose more than five per cent per raid, we’ll keep sending more heavies and crews.” More heavies and crews. Ike studied that statement for a while. He generally liked to study statements.

If you lost five per cent per raid and you went on twenty-five raids, that meant the chances were 125 per cent against you. Could it be that bad?

Anyway, the crews, as they got more raids to their credit, were flying safer positions in the box-shaped formations.

The GIs had the odds figured to their satisfaction anyhow. On your first ten raids your chances to finish missions were 15 to 1 against you. Then the odds got better. If you had completed ten missions, the chances that you would finish came down to 5

to 1, and then to even chances. But even those odds were better *now*, with more fighters.

But why should he bother at all? He wasn't flying to Germany or any place else. Flying wasn't his part of the war-winning. He was the guy who repaired broken bodies and sewed back flesh. Mind-repairing was not his specialty.

Ike repeated his thoughts. They didn't sound right. Who was speaking? Certainly not he. This was not that man of sentiment who wanted to be a general practitioner; or was it?

Ike blinked, shocked by his thoughts. Was he guilty of dealing with men, men of spirit and soul, as if they were so much grain or meat? Was this the hardening caused by war? Did it mean he had become a killer, too? Killers concentrated, they said. Killers calculated—they took in the dope and handed back the scores!

He burst out talking. Was he trying to escape his thoughts? Escaping from fear, perhaps? In a jerky voice he threw words against the side of the hut. He began viciously.

"I can't help it. I can't help it if they don't come back. I'm not being accused. I'm dead tired. That's what's wrong with me. I'm tired. I shouldn't think about it. Thinkin' gets a guy down. But these thoughts are on my mind all day, all night. I've gotta talk them out. Talk them out. Christ, if I could just quit this God-damned thinkin' and talkin'.

"But what's the use?" Ike subconsciously could

feel a sickly fever rising within him. His breathing was becoming more difficult. If he could just find his Epsom salts and take a big dose—maybe a good bowel movement would relax his stomach muscles. But his thoughts jumped about from bowel movements to airplanes, and from there to nowhere and back. He was losing control of himself and his thoughts. His normally deep-throated voice was becoming scratchy and irritating. He mouthed words that, unframed, were like those of a stranger.

“Why—my God—why? are they just dying so far away from me? How can I do something, anything? Why do they tell me they don’t hate the enemy? It doesn’t make good sense.

“When I first came over, it was the enemy who killed them. Now who kills them? It might be the generals, or the Air Force might kill ’em. Do the Germans kill them?

“Who are the Germans when you are so high above the earth? Americans, Germans, British, anyone loses personality up there. That air is so thin, so clean, and so sweet.” He’d been on four missions and he knew about this business of being just outside the pearly gates. Maybe that was influencing air battles. Maybe that being so near the Pearly Gates would explain lots of things. For instance, this code of letting wheels down when you’re shot up and ready to quit. Not even Jerry lets a guy have a burst when he’s got his wheels down.

Ike thought. What had he been saying? “Their

world." Whose world? The enemy's and theirs? What a strange thing for him to say? How had he said it when he knew he hated the Germans to his own way of thinking. He knew they hated him. Was he losing his mind?

There was one point clear. You must not think about what happens up there over the twenty thousand-foot mark. It was like asking God to explain things men shouldn't know. Crews got awful close to something up there that they couldn't talk about. He knew. He had talked to so many. He'd watched the sassy, young, fresh brats come over, and then, a few months later, they went home sober and sixty.

"Sure, they grow up," Ike began speaking to the walls again, "Sure, they learn; but the question is what do they learn?" For a minute he reflected on his own words. They seemed wise.

"Some boys come over and go home as tough and rough as the day they were unpacked from their cowhide jackets. God surely never meant them to be any different anyhow. Then, there are those who come through fear—who master their own minds." Ike went back to his silent pondering again. Yes, he guessed, they were worth the worry. They were America. But what about the men who were killed or were prisoners? They were America, too. He hadn't been thinking about them.

"Well, we're all in it, aren't we, wherever we are. I think it's the guys that get killed that—" Ike paused in the middle of his sentence. Then he went on.

"Those guys are the real men." Ike was stopped by the tears that freeze on a strong man's face. They were the tears of his thoughts—of decaying memories—not watery as a woman's might be. He literally could see the boys riding around in heaven—laughing—and teaching the angels American slang! The angels would be chewing gum before long, too, if they could get the chicle production going up there! Three days ago he knew a boy whom the Germans had shot down, so the critique said. But Ike knew he never touched ground. He had gone on, and up.

Ike, quarrelling with himself, seemed to reach a verdict as he continued aloud, solemnly pronouncing:

"A guy's gotta be tired, worn out, before he dies. You can't die just like that." Then like a doctor retiring from a tough operation, he sat down quietly.

Who shall live—a pretty grim thing to think about. But if he never did anything else, he was bound to think it all through. He was going to face facts. He must. It was all part of his job. If you were going to understand fighting men, you had to understand what they were thinking about, and how they got that way!

Maybe this being a flight surgeon had its hard times, but there were the good times too—there were results. He decided to follow the others to chow. He started to make for the door. He almost had to push his thoughts aside to get out of the room. But before he could reach the door, the 'phone rang. Ike picked up the receiver.

"Piss pot—they're here."

There was no point in asking questions. It was quite obvious what T.G. meant, and with that greeting it just had to be T.G.

Not that Ike considered himself all wise, but he had known all along that the boys would turn up. You *know* that because that's a basic assumption a guy works on. In this theatre, at least, if you "buy it" and are quoted in the black-drape list at home, you don't have to walk all the way down to hell to oblige your creditors. Not half, you don't. Furthermore, a lot of the guys were like horned toads when it came to dying. Fact of the matter was that lots of them never did. In proof of this, the R.A.F. a long time ago had started a custom that certainly was handed over to our Air Forces when they hit England. If a guy didn't come back, the cash in his pocketbook provided a going-away party for his close friends. The whole idea ran this way: the fellow's closest friend invited a few others. The invitation was the highest honor that could be paid to those outside his close circle of friends. In short, it meant that you were "in." The host really just "went on." They always drank to that host who gave the party: "Here's to when we meet again, choom."

Back to realities, Ike realised that T.G. was soloing over the phone. T.G. was really raving.

"The little dears look splendidly. Pappy's cut his mouth. The remaining hams in his 'meat bucket' arrived in my official establishment without their usual attire, having tossed it gaily aside in their

mad rush to return to this charming base. I arranged with the cook to hash up a local horse in their special honor. I shall direct them on their merry way as soon as I have finished interrogating 'em."

"Tell Pappy I want him to come by here as soon as he feeds," said Ike. In his heart he knew he must get this Dave thing straightened out, but quickly.

"Ike, Pappy says if Stevie got that whiskey like he promised, he'll be only too delighted to drive his fatigued feet over in your direction."

"The whiskey's here in force."

"Okay then, Pappy says to tell you he's a comin'. Lay those coals on the fire. Speed up the Chippewa. Pappy says it was fifty-two degrees below zero up top to-day. He's bringing Fritz and Coots to keep him from falling on his face before he gets that lovely smell of whiskey in his hair."

"Rah-jer." Ike almost whistled back. "I shall hang onto my chair while I wait."

What a crazy place this base was. There were the I.O.'s—Stevie, Wheats, Joe, T.G.—good hut mates for a flight surgeon. Such a bunch never normally would have found each other back home, or ever attempted to work out any mutual salvation. Salvation was your own lookout at home. Here it was a Community chest.

Of those many crews, take Pappy's as an example; pilot—solid, married, steady as the hunter but very young. Then that co-pilot, Dave—unstable, nervy but thoroughbred. Then Fritz, their bombardier, a tried and true Texan right down to the jingle jangle

spurs, but of German descent. By marriage, they said, a distant relation of Hitler's. Fritz was so tall he had to fold himself over four times before he could get in the nose of a Lib—but a damn good bombardier, the very best, and eager.

George, the navigator, was a lieutenant. Like the other three, his work was *par excellence* but George was even more a bag of nerves than Dave. By rights, it should have been George who stayed home. Then there were the gunners and the radio operator.

Pappy's radio operator was Benito the Bookie. Benito's name wasn't really Benito. His legal name was Nick Venucci. Benito came from upstate New York. Back home, he'd been a bookmaker in his spare time—or rather he worked at a legitimate job during the daytime.

He was short ; looked like a jockey with a keg of beer inside him. Benito said he was *always* on the legitimate side of the numbers racket. Just a gambler at heart, but his legs were too short for his body. He was the kind of person who could lay hand on whiskey day or night. Where it came from was a dark secret. He could get into a crowd and beat anybody out of anything with his olive-oil charm. Most of all, he wasn't afraid and liked combat. That made the boys feel there must be something good in bookmakers after all.

Benito learned about radios at Army training school, but he was going to give it up after the war and go back to his old business. The boys claimed if Benito got shot down and put in Stalag III, he'd

have his gambling business going by the second morning.

The top turret gunner, and engineer was O'Toole, a loud-talking, hard-working, fast-drinking, red-nosed Irishman who was, by his father's word, just like his ancestors. It never took him more than ten minutes to find a girl in a new town—and his intentions and his campaigns were so streamlined that he seldom bothered to learn names. To O'Toole, every girl was 'darlin.' He was more interested in that Liberator's No. 3 engine, which hadn't sounded so good yesterday, or a leak in the oxygen line. Engineer O'Toole knew "Flak Alley" too intimately for an inanimate object. He might have been a light-hearted lover, but he was a cautious, conscientious mechanic. Before the ship took off, he inspected her minutely. After take-off, he'd check his lines and connections. He was continually talking over the interphone. He was fond of giving lurid descriptions of his latest conquests, and would monopolise the interphone; that's the way he got over his nervousness.

"Chicken Leonard," Flak Alley's left waist-gunner, was a farm boy from Iowa who still thought in terms of livestock. From the air he'd excitedly poke "Bicarb" in the ribs and say, "Look at the heifer down below; ain't she a beauty?" The hands that had hardened on the plough fitted the waist gun. Those eyes that used to distinguish the partridge from the pheasant could spot tiny specks in the distance. Focke-Wulf or Messerschmitt. He got nicknamed

that first day he was assigned to Pappy's crew. He shuffled up to report, shy and nervous. Long arms fell from his shoulders and a cap sat squarely on his head. He looked like an eighth grader being punished for throwing spitballs. "Bicarb" took one look at him, and laughed like hell. "Pipe our new gunner," he announced, "he's just a chicken." It was "Chicken" Leonard from that time on. When O'Toole could start to relate, in vivid detail, his amorous adventures, "Bicarb" would start. "Wait. Not in front of Chicken. I haven't told him about the flowers and the bees yet."

Larry Hobart even dreamed about ball turrets. He saw himself curled up in the glass bowl as they flew over Germany. In his dreams, flak kept bursting closer and closer to the turret, and when he would awake in the morning, he would turn to O'Toole and say, "Christ! They almost got me last night." He was more nervous in his dreams than he was in the plane, however, for once he got into position, suspended in space below the body of the ship, he was calm and quiet. Even during the heat of fighter attacks, when excited voices would shout over the interphone, Hobart remained serene. In a calm monotone he would announce, "Fighter coming in at 4 o'clock, low . . . 4 o'clock . . ." Or, as a commendation for "Bicarb" after shooting one down, ". . . that gentleman won't trouble us any more. . ." Hobart was from California and, as most of the Westerners, was a good deal more conscious of the Japanese and the Pacific war than of the European

one. He still could not quite believe that he was flying over France and Germany instead of Pacific islands and Japan itself. "You know," he told Cohen one day, "from the day I enlisted in the Army, I was certain that I would be shooting at Zeros and watching our bombs drop on the little yellow bastards. Instead I am further from Japan than I have ever been in my life." Hobart was one of the few men who followed the events of the Pacific war methodically. He knew the status of each island in the Pacific, and while the others would wax enthusiastic over occasional outstanding events of the Air Forces or the fleet in Japanese waters, Hobart would look at them amusedly and tell them that for months that naval battle or air attack was being planned. The movement of the fleet or the capture of some obscure atoll had all been groundwork for the big move.

The GI crews were steady in a way of their own, all right. It probably was because they were just like a travelling vaudeville show. Humor often mothers fraternity. Why officers don't get richly infected by the GI humor is a puzzle all in itself.

Ike suddenly remembered his stomach. Maybe *that* was why he had been doing all this thinking—a guy had to eat regularly. You can't be rational on an empty stomach. He started out of the door, nearly upsetting the Chippewa, who was entering again with the coal buckets.

"Put lots of coal on that stove, Private Wa-Wa," Ike yelled, "I'll be right back."

CHAPTER V

PAPPY always appealed as the kind of person anyone would have liked to have been. Plain married and plain-minded! As for Ike and Stevie, it's pretty obvious that Ike married to get what Stevie got by staying single. Dave was more like Stevie. Having something in common comes from living the same sort of life, and it starts 'way back when you were a fist-sized kid. But growing up like Dave is a complex process. It's not just a pillar-to-post existence. It's more like a man growing up by elimination—by graduating from woman to woman.

Memories, growing and living the same sort of life, are scheduled events in a flyer's life. In those long hours of flying back and forth to Germany and, in truth, those times when the fighters come in, the boys look back at their lives in jagged outline. The things that stand out are more those that remain pictorial, and not the glorious victories over good and evil. What does spring back into mind are the worry points. It takes a lot of memory-digging to remember those niceties that people generally flaunt with "that makes it all worthwhile." All these things you think about and look back toward.

For instance Dave had said once on a mission to Kiel he remembered in retrospect many things. There appeared before him a play-box on a white, sandy beach at St. Augustine, Florida. He re-

membered, too, St. Augustine's hotel lobbies. They looked like huge public lavatories. The forts made good rock-houses for juveniles. The date palms that lined the streets seemed ignorant and stupid. Their only contribution was a questionable beauty. Then he remembered horses and carriages. The horses were mostly Georgia scrub ponies. The carriages were antique versions of Old-South gaiety, with fringed canopies and worn-out seats. He never did remember seeing a new one. Perhaps they had disappeared with the Seminoles.

His father had a business in the North, and he went to kindergarten there. Dave learned to lace his shoes by practising on canvas frames. And there was his teacher, whom his father admired.

Dave's father always promoted things. He even promoted Dave. But his promotion of Dave lacked oversight, and Dave was, to his father, as a fine horse is to a racing man. The father seemed proud of the flesh but unwilling to tender the spirit necessary to give Dave that association with something strong, which he had needed when he was just a young boy. The father was the kind of ashly-vested materialistic connoisseur of the dollar bill. He knew its every turn, but he didn't know his son. The son was a creature of him—part of the ashly face—part of the father's ego.

Dave's family were a restless group of individuals. Soon they moved South again. He went to grammar school there. Dave was a radish in his grammar school play. The only wisdom his new teacher ever

exhibited was offensive to him ; she cast his girl-friend as a cabbage. But the teacher was right. Dave saw that girl a few years ago. She was still a cabbage. His closest male friend was a carrot in that same play. The carrot's dead now. He "bought it" the very first day of the war, out in the Pacific.

After grammar school there were private school and dancing classes. Dave used to go sailing after dancing classes. Those were the days of the outboard motor, silent movies, short skirts and prohibition whiskey. He had tasted whiskey only once before he went away to boarding school. He wasn't quite a man then.

And then there was boarding school ! Dave never did like boarding school. He bribed one of the maids to help him make a getaway. One day he almost made it. He had hocked his watch and saved a lot of money. But he met a fellow who was going to a burlesque show, and changed his mind about leaving school.

There were summers on Long Island. Dave remembered a red-headed girl in a rose garden. She had smiled and called it love.

He really started to grow up seriously when he went to College, and began to enjoy women with a passion that was hardly pure. One of Dave's first loves was a nurse who used to advise, "Always leave one tiny light on. It creates atmosphere."

The classes at college weren't very interesting. There were only two professors he could remember. One was an economist, the other was an English

teacher. It was their inspiration, more than their instruction, that made for understanding.

There wasn't much work done at his college. He remembered, too, his Dad always insisted on a budget. But having a budget didn't help his money problem. He couldn't clutch coins, and Dave kept going to college year after year. A lot of guys refuse to go out into the world. Maybe that's a "fear of fear." The Army Weekly talked about its causing breakdowns in the Army, but how about fear in civilians? When all is said and done, it's almost easier to go to war.

Dave watched modes and details when he came to England. He was not a dull boy, for instance; even the cows in England seemed different to Dave. Their tails were so muscular they could point them right up in the air like some prehistoric animal. It wasn't like that at home, where cows' tails are fly-swishers. There was plenty to keep your mind circling around all the time. There were new character studies in every hut, every billet.

The waitresses at the Officers' Mess were parish gangsterettes with chafed, flushed faces and legs that could have carried twice their weight. The back door to the kitchen was equipped with an imaginary funnel that poured food into the localities' hands. The food around the base was in such abundance that when you sat down to chow you felt like a starving Armenian being feted by a black marketeer. But then, our national pride is responsible for a lot of things, both good and bad. Those early aggressive

religionist Americans who wore pioneer hats with narrow-minded hat bands left more than cobblestones to remind us of their day. They left their emotional instability as well. That's how Grandpa came to be a spasmodic spiritual thinker. His aggressiveness in a new land provided success; and, childlike in his innocence, he put up a big signboard for the world to see: "Follow me to Salvation." Now, in this food and equipment proposition, it's as much a question of keeping up with that sign as mother-loving somebody far, far away. A lot of folks feel this war is the proving ground for our national pride. Someone once said that if you tell an American anything, he never really listens. Americans have a self-assurance that if they wanted to learn what you know or do, they could do it twice as well.

So, maybe, when you think of it, the challenge forwarded by that pioneer hat is not so bad. It may lead us up the stairs of international life.

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CHAPTER VI

MISSIONS to Kiel, to Leipzig, and to God-only-knows-where might have produced thinking spells for Dave, but for Marianne her thinking came between serving coffee to returning flyers, between hearing stories of the would-be glamour boys, and patiently listening to how Mr. Johnnie Q., air-gunner, shot down the Luftwaffe. Her life behind her, in outline, spread as a wake from a small boat. It was uneven, it was twisted, and in places indistinguishable from other people's lives to which she seemed attached. Marianne had joined the Red Cross as a gesture. She was one of many millions of people in uniform and she had wanted to volunteer. She needed the nobleness that the Red Cross afforded—the sense of charity that they stood for. Marianne's life had been a pillar-to-post existence. Really Marianne had gone from person to person, seeking but not finding, wanting but never satisfying. A desire to live in a great new modern world. Basically, she was perhaps growing up, but her growing up had been such an arduous task, not only for herself, but for her friends too. She had become a responsibility to the post, to the C.O., to the Red Cross. Her sympathies went out in all directions, but assumed the ugliness of an octopus, in effect, for the tentacles of her desires never brought good—never brought, even to herself, that satisfaction which she sought after. Why Ike had never noticed that Marianne

was as much a problem child as his other patients was scratching a problem that went deep into Army ethics. After all Marianne was really just a civilian.

The Red Cross Aero Club was infected with noise and smoke. Tobacco smoke fairly oozed out of the swinging doors. Marianne walked in, nonchalant in manner but hurt in heartily pride. Despite the fact that it was her night off, Marianne had come back for the simple reason that she could not stand her own company. She had plans for this night and now they were utterly defeated. Dave had gone off in a fit of rage and she was supposing to be masterful. Anything would suffice to provide an escape route away from her own thoughts. Who cared what her excuse was, she thought. And then talking to herself "Let me feel the shelter of human beings and their noise and everything."

"Hello, Marianne. I thought this was your night off" Claire Marshall interrupted her cake cutting and began chatting with Marianne. Claire Marshall was English and lived near the base where she ran her family's estate and kept house for her two brothers. She was a volunteer relief helper at the enlisted men's Aero Club. Claire readily sensed that Marianne was unusually upset about something and was trying to pave the way for her to overcome or at least forget, her embarrassment.

"The cake is cut and the sandwiches are fixed but I actually don't think there's going to be much of a crowd. There's moving pictures next door to-night and they will run until after we close."

"Thanks Claire" Marianne said mellowing in her attitude towards the world at large. "I planned to work on the accounts to-night." Wanting to talk she picked up the conversation and carried it herself. "How is everything? This weather gets me down. I always think I need a new 'perm' around here."

Then dropping the conversation almost as abruptly as she had begun rambling on, Marianne walked away as if to indicate that she simply could not bear Claire's too understanding and enquiring glances for another second.

Claire was rung back to reality by two G.I.'s who swaggered over and demanded coffee as an excuse to talk to Claire. Then chiding her they added:

"You won't forget to show yourself up Saturday for the dance? Remember your promise."

Joining his friend's case the other chimed in with "And you promised not to be dated up either, baby."

Apparently quite satisfied and happy with their approach to Claire the boys walked back into their corner.

Claire smiled after them. Then turning she looked across the room to where Marianne had de-coated herself and settled down to her book-keeping. Marianne was very pale. Alone, she drifted from herself into her private reserve of troubles. Each time she would fix her staring and lost in plotting became forlorn in outward appearance.

Claire had served a dozen coffees when Marianne sneaked back and catching Claire's eye, mused aloud

"It's lovely and warm in here to-night." The clear blue-grey colour of Claire's eyes possessed an encouraging warmth.

Marianne had never been apt to display particular liking for Claire mainly because she thought her just too prim and too quiet. She didn't give out and you couldn't figure what she was thinking. Then this female had a naturalness and self possession that annoyed Marianne to the breaking point. She could never put Claire up as a glamour girl but there was no denying that there was something ethereal about her that surely was 'class.' She was the Squire's daughter all right, well educated and properly turned out. Now with a child's curiosity Marianne tried conversation again.

"Why haven't you ever decided to get married Claire." Then stammering slightly she quickly explained "I mean, I think you should."

Claire laughed right out loud. "Marianne darling, you know you are wonderfully honest. You mean you think I should have done it while I was still under twenty. Perhaps I am ageing. Maybe, Marianne, I've never found the right man." She ended her speech happily enough, smiling a little wickedly.

"Sorry, really, I didn't try to offend, really, believe me. I only thought looking at you now that men must go for you. Of course, they might think your emotions are a trifle cold."

Whatever turn the conversation was going to take, Claire seemed genuinely amused.

"But still waters run deep, Marianne. I, cool? What nonsense. There is no such thing as being completely insensitive. It's a question of give and take."

"I guess so" Marianne echoed. Then after a short breath pause, "But it's damn seldom balanced as to give and take between two people, Claire dear. There is always one who takes more. How can I explain. Outsiders just can't understand." Marianne was resolving her problems publicly but she felt determined to talk aloud. "I will be very frank. I crave affection. I live for it. I want to be nice to people but I don't like the thought that they might laugh at me. I want affection in return. But where does it all lead? In the end you hate men, but then it's too late for you've lost your looks and they don't care whether you like them or not and for all they care you can pack your bag and ride straight out to hell and gone. I've thought this angle out and I've got it figured that a gal ought to hook her man and hitch up just as soon as she can. Marrying is no delayed action bomb except in your heart."

Marianne concluded with surprise but with a sense of righteous duty done and then threw herself back into her chair in comparative victory. It sounded more as if she were persuading her own emotions than Claire's.

"Have you found the right man, Marianne?" Claire queried seriously. The Marianne-Dave affair was common shop talk on the base. But that Marianne played round the clock when other boys

let her have enough bait was not the King's secret. Claire didn't have to succumb to the gossip to make her own deductions.

As a mature woman she was probably more in a position to understand that physical yearning, striving, dissatisfied nature of Marianne. She also recognized the other girl's insane desire to surround these other desires with security. Marianne in her heart was basically zealous, easily excited into affection, warm and impulsive—but also rash, yielding and unstable. Somewhere in the remote recesses of her brain Claire subconsciously acknowledged that Marianne was seeking protection from that very source, men, who had roused and encouraged her conflicting and distressing qualities. Claire became automatically sad and sympathetic for this girl who in vigorous youth possessed God's gift to make friends easily but lost them quickly in her fear of being left behind.

Marianne had pondered over that question of Claire's. Had she found her man? From outside had come the imposition reverting her forcefully to ways of old habits. She hardened and with set expressions flung her answer at Claire.

"Sure I have. I mean to keep him this time, too. You betcha your life I will too."

The statement seemed final enough and Claire was otherwise encumbered serving cake and coffee. Marianne chewed her pen. She dismissed Dave's queer behavior as a mood and smiled inwardly as she recounted her many victories and that the only time

Dave had really softened was when he had seen her naked body. He had forgotten everything and bent towards her. His passion was fresh and endless. She accepted her reward confidently. His begging lips wetting her body were reassurance. She had won many times and she would win again and Marianne felt strong in her convictions.

Claire took her away from these forebodings. "Marianne, do you think I might run along home now. I would like to go a little early to-night. Would you mind awfully. It's pretty filthy outside and I want to visit a couple of people on the way." Further, Claire didn't see any valid reason for being a helper when there were so few boys in the club.

"No, certainly not Claire. You are very sweet to do what you can. I'll be fine. I'll manage okay." Marianne was considerably more cheery than when she had come over to the club earlier.

Claire slipped on her coat and overshoes and made for the door turning to bid Marianne goodnite.

"Bye for now Marianne" she called back. Claire then pulled a gay, printed scarf over her fair hair and went into the night. As she detoured mud puddles with the help of her flashlight she thought more of the problem child—Marianne. Could she get Dave into her definition of "Her man." A few raindrops fell on her face and she hurried on. Claire had promised to meet her brother at B.O.Q. dash 201.

♦

CHAPTER VII

NISSEN HUT, B.O.Q. *dash* 201, echoed with an unnatural silence. Wa-Wa, the Chippewa, moved noiselessly, straightening up the untidy foster home of the Intelligence officers. It was no easy task for an orderly to clean up after I.O.'s. They usually worked all night, slept most of the day and fought their battles before meals. That didn't leave much time for an orderly to clean up and make beds.

Wa-Wa didn't mind those odd hours so very much. He didn't have too many friends to go places with. The only thing that made him sore occasionally was the fact that you had to have so much discipline in the Army. Of course, you could do a lot of things off the record if you only knew how. But that didn't seem quite right to Wa-Wa. Principles were principles. In his own way, he thought he was a pretty good soldier. It was only the too-often-unbearable discipline that irked him.

He thought of himself as "the soup" being prepared by a high-toned chef who dabbles with his mixture, then adds spice and everything nice—but only when the chef feels in the mood. So, he figured, in the Army or Air Forces it is a question of whether you are the dabbler or the dabbled-with. Sometimes you feel mighty dabbled-with when those orders start flowing out. He'd like to try being the dabbler, just for a little while.

As Wa-Wa finished his job and was placing the

chairs back around the card table, Joe and Stevie stepped into B.O.Q. *dash* 201.

Joe questioned Wa-Wa about phone calls, and Wa-Wa was having considerable trouble making himself understood. Joe attempted to decipher what Private Wa-Wa was trying to say.

"Now, Wa-Wa, take it slower this time. Start at the beginning."

"Little man—big scalp," Wa-Wa reluctantly repeated.

"Hold it, Okay, got you kid," shouted Stevie. "Joe, he probably means Ike, bald head—big scalp. Easy, isn't it?"

Joe was practically bleeding at his fingertips as he patiently tried again: "Listen, Stevie, shut up. Give the guy time. Go on Wa-Wa; please go on. What did Captain Ike tell you?"

Wa-Wa could not answer. It was very difficult to translate first into Chippewa, and then into his few English words, that the white officer rushed out and would rush back again. A Chippewa just didn't do that sort of thing easily. He never rushed himself.

The sad-faced Chippewa was determined to explain. He would demonstrate in pantomime.

Wa-Wa began by trotting out and into the room again. Stevie and Joe stood up and gawked in amazement. On the third round trip Wa-Wa appeared, smiling right down his long face. He had achieved success at last! In tow were Ike, Pappy, Fritz and Coots. All whoopin' it up in good ole Indian fashion.

"Nice idea, Stevie. Think it up yourself?" jeered Pappy.

Fritz straightened up and chimed in, "Sweet little place you boys have here. Where's the whiskey?"

Stevie was embarrassed by the turn of events. He looked a little like the storekeeper of the proverbial china shop recently invaded by the town bull. The situation was far too serious for him to be accused of playing Indians, when he was supposed to be the grandfather of the base, and have his head screwed on, be serious, and everything. Ignoring Pappy for the moment, he turned to Wa-Wa and said with a pained expression:

"Thank you very much, Wa-Wa, for bringing Captain Ike back alive." The "alive" was pure sarcasm.

But Wa-Wa was not very happy, either. They were laughing, and surely making fun of him. He picked up his coal buckets and trailed out of the room.

Stevie reproached the company. "Beats the hell outta me why you big grown-up boys always have to be so damn silly. Now you've hurt our private Wa-Wa's feelings. He's only been trying to be helpful."

Then, settling his interest on Pappy, Stevie continued, "Well, Pappy, we are delighted to welcome you back to B.O.Q. *dash* 201. Indeed we are! Now, Ike here has a problem for you. A lovely court-martial, and dear Marianne is due round this place any minute. Unless I miss my guess, she's in one

of her butchering moods, and no foolin'. As far 'as I can see, you are in a pretty hot spot. Remind me; I shall have to be worried about your health, Pappy."

"Nice of you, Stevie, to think of me," Pappy smiled.

Going on, Stevie counselled, "Then, of course, there are a few minor points, amigo! Jimmy, that orderly of yours, got drunk last night and gave away the best part of three barrels of the base's beer to his friends. It seems that he was on duty over at the bar; and, since there was an alert on and business was slow, Jimmy decided to do a little samplin'. It looks like somebody has taken the whole matter far too seriously. The mess officer has actually threatened to have Jimmy court-martialled. Pappy, you'll have to try and get him put on kitchen police before that lieutenant gets a chance to put the bite on him.

"To try to settle the matter I fixed it up to buy the entire lot of beer and remove the evidence. For your information, what's left of one of those bubbling barrels is right here in this B.O.Q. now, and I am swallowing my share to-night. Something to soothe a tired business man."

"Think I'll help you to do that little job, Stevie," Joe interrupted.

But Stevie paid Joe no never mind. He went right on talking, "Dave's a nice problem for you, Pappy—and Marianne. Dear little girl that she ain't! You know, it's usually the same when women walk in; it's like the entry of two personalities—of

good and evil, of for and against, of nausea and love, all at once. The whole trouble is, of course, that no one can ever tell just which is which, and no two people ever agree on the which.

"Marianne's no exception. She reminds me of a gal back home who was oversexed, overstuffed and under-attended. I remember she used to love the little things, like cats and tulips—after all she had nothing else to sleep with. I don't relish girls like that. For my money, Marianne's an exact duplicate of that gal back home. Frankly, gentlemen, count me outta' that little deal. I'm going to get stinking on Jimmy's beer. And how! And now!

"Oh, Christ, Pappy, I almost forgot. Happy birthday, happy birthday! Happy birthday to you! Sorry I can't sing but your present's in the corner."

Stevie pointed over to the two bottles of whiskey, feeling a dull sense of guilt that his own mental struggles so long had stifled the greeting that long ago should have been on his lips for Pappy.

Pappy, too, had almost forgotten his birthday. Relieved by the thought of a celebration, he replied:

"What! Only two bottles? That's hardly enough, Stevie; not after to-day. But thanks, anyhow, Granddad! May I pour anybody a whiskey?"

Fritz, Ike and Coots chorused, "Yes." Joe said he'd wait for Stevie to produce the beer. Stevie put the bottles on the table. Pappy twisted the corks and poured. Joe passed a pack of cigarettes.

"Well," Pappy started off, "I've had one delightful birthday, all right. To begin with, Dave gets the

pink eye and stays home.” He purposely avoided mention of Marianne. His boys had agreed to forget they saw her that morning. He went on, “We hunt up another co-pilot and finally get Coots. We shove off to Never Never Land in search of a German factory big enough to house Roosevelt’s and Churchill’s ideas. The damned thing ought to figure about a mile long. How in God’s name we ever wound up missing it beats the hell out of me, General.”

“Yeah, Pappy,” Fritz interjected, “that R.A.F. liaison Officer at the briefing this morning was saying, ‘You cawn’t miss it, old boy ; you cawn’t miss it.’ Seems to me around here the password is ‘You cawn’t miss it,’ until they just plain can’t find something or somewhere, and get lost ; but good and lost ! They know where they are going, so you are supposed to know all those important little details, too. It’s just crazy.” Fritz blew air out of the corner of his mouth.

“Then we get airborne,” Pappy went on, “and circle round and round for three hours waiting for all the guys to pull the plug out. All the time we gain altitude it is getting colder than a pig’s ass. Shall I give you boys a blow-by-blow description ? ”

All too seriously, Ike answered, “I think you’d better, Pappy. We’ve all really been sweating this day out.”

“Okay, here goes. Well, we finally leave the coast. We’re about five degrees off course. George is squawking as usual into the interphone. We’re

flying on the outside of the 'box' in the wing position." Pappy stopped and slapped an open hand on the table.

"That reminds me. Hey, Stevie, you're a bastard, now aren't you? I understand you put us out on the hickory limb to-day. Now, don't you think you could have done better'n that? It's just plain murder on that wing deal. We've flown out there for six trips now."

Stevie countered. He felt Pappy's comment contained little, if any, of that discretion as to those times and places you can say things.

"Incidentally, Pappy, where's that navigator of yours?"

"You mean George?" Pappy by this time was rolling out his tale despite a natural inclination to be restrained. "Well, mind your shoestrings, Stevie; I'm coming to him later. That kind sure gets me sore. He's just as unstable as G.I. Jello. Anyway, don't try to change the subject. How come you to put us on that damn wing every blessed trip?"

"You haven't got a kick in the world. This is only your sixth mission. Get ten done. Then come back and start bitching—but not before. So now just forget it."

Ike, Stevie, Joe and T.G., knew the new boys, were flying tough positions as far as flak and fighters were concerned. But really, flying wing man was like going to sky kindergarten. Training back home, no matter how good, didn't eliminate the kindergarten days. First you get over being panicky. You don't

start out a hero, the way Mamma likes to think of you. No such luck! First there's that first stomachless feeling. Then the feel of evasive action or ducking flak. Then you cool off. Perhaps if you get icy enough, somebody pins a medal on your chest for those first five trips. Really, that medal signifies that you have passed out of kindergarten. In sequence of time, your ship becomes element leader, group leader and so on, until one day you can hope to lead the whole parade to Naziland. Finally, with memories of beer and chow lines, you complete a tour of missions and kiss England goodbye.

Pappy accepted his fate. He knew the whole routine. Stevie was not intending to be too rough. His words, after he had spoken them, seemed pretty harsh. Pappy must have thought so, for he continued.

"Yes sir! I'm too tired to fight. I bow to rank. Well, back to my story; we get about twenty-five minutes inland, past the enemy coast. The flak is right up there to greet us. 'Chicken' was at the left waist gun. He was always touchy about flak, and shouted, 'Hey Pappy, they're shootin' at us.' I wanted to put a stop to that sort of chatter, so I hurled a few sarcasms at him: 'Yeh, I know "Chicken," but what do you want me to do—pull my rank on 'em?' He piped down.

"George is squawking louder than ever, so now I'll give you that play-by-play description—Chapter I: 'Flak Alley in Action,' like I promised. To begin with, George's voice is always shrill on the interphone,

and the higher the altitude the higher the pitch of his voice.

“ ‘Can’t they see we’re lost? For Christ’s sake call ’em up, Pappy; we’re miles west of course. Over.’ ”

“ George is roarin’. So I answer him: ‘Listen, you ham, stay where you are, before you get frost-bite. We’re not leading this outfit! Quit spittin’ ice cubes. Relax. Relax.’ ”

“ But, my God, Ike, he was right. I looked over the side and there we were—on the wrong side of Duesseldorf—and right square over the topside of ‘Happy Valley,’ and the flak is really jumpin’ up at us.

“ About then, four formations of Thunderbolts swept in from the north-west. They came down to about a thousand feet over our heads, their white smoke-trails trackin’ up the whole sky. By this time we’ve been upstairs almost four hours. It made you darn near boil to think those fighters had only left their mess hall about twenty minutes or half an hour before. We’d been stooging around for three to four hours. Let me tell you that delaying business sure eats on your nerves. It makes you think you’re going pretty slow.

“ Then Coots, who hasn’t been doing a damn thing but ogling the scenery for more than an hour, spots an enemy fighter and blurts out, ‘Copilot to pilot; enemy attacking nine o’clock high. Over.’ ”

“ ‘Pilot to copilot, Rah-jer. Rah-jer.’ ”

“ Then I gave the boys the good word,” continued

Pappy, " 'Pilot to crew. Enemy attacking nine o'clock high. Man your guns.'

"I could just see those waist gunners leaning on each other, taking it easy. So I gave 'em a plug over the interphone :

" 'Pilot to Waist-gunners. Wake up. "Bicarb," did you hear me ? Fighter nine o'clock high. Report. Report. Over.'

" 'Right waist-gunner to pilot. Got you. Rah-jer. Rah-jer.'

"Then 'Muscles' Cohen broke in :

" 'Tail-gunner to pilot. Another enemy fighter six o'clock. He's coming straight at me. Over.'

" 'Pilot to tail-gunner. Rah-jer. Rah-jer.'

"Things happen awfully fast when you are being attacked. Ten seconds may be a whole lifetime. No sooner had I answered Cohen than he called me back :

" 'I've got him. Got him ! Hot damn. Sold to the gentleman in the black hat. Over.'

" 'Pilot to tail-gunner. Quit bragging.'

" 'Muscles' put in again :

" 'Tail-gunner to pilot. No kidding, Pappy, I did get him. 'Betcha a lollie-pop.' He blew to bits. Say, Pappy, it's gettin' hotter'n hell back here. Somebody must have let a "stray" shoot me while I was working.'

" 'Pilot to tail-gunner. Quit the goddam horsing around. What's wrong ? Report. Over.'

" 'Tail-gunner to pilot. Felt like a 20-mm. cleaned a little silk out of my parachute. Another one blew

a hole just over my left foot. A third pot-shot bounced off the glass.'

" ' Pilot to tail-gunner. Are you hurt ? Over.'

" Then Cohen said that he hadn't even been scratched."

" Well, when we got back to-night," Pappy added, " I asked Cohen how come he's got so hot on his guns for a change. He began telling me some long tale about himself and Pat Murphy, that screwball line chief of mine. He said that he and old Pat had a couple of side bets. I never did get it quite straight what he was talking about."

Fritz set his drink aside. " I know the story, Pappy. Pat Murphy and "Muscles" got into an argument as to why Cohen was such a damn rotten shot. "Muscles" claimed he had no incentive. So Pat ups and says he'll make it worth his while. Pat offers to pay off "Muscles" Cohen a dollar bill in honest money for every fighter confirmed as down. Looks to me like Murphy's incentive has put Cohen in business for himself !"

Everybody in the room smiled. They all knew Cohen only too well. A nice kid. A sharp trader. Talked too much and was the sloppiest guy in the outfit, but otherwise an okay GI. They all knew that Cohen, being Jewish, wouldn't help him any if he got shot down over Naziland.

Only the week before Cohen had provided the base's best gag. In fact, that's when the boys had started calling him "Muscles." Cohen's new wife "by proxy" sent him all the equipment to make his

body strong and beautiful. It arrived in a terrific box marked "Consult O'Brien, the Body-Builder." There was everything from boxing gloves to dumbbells. Hence Cohen accumulated his title, "Muscles."

Pappy got on with his story. "Well, in the meantime what had actually happened was that "Bicarb" had been so interested in Cohen's shooting a Jerry that he had completely forgotten *he* was supposed to shoot at the enemy, too. He just stood there with his jaws hanging out his waist window and never pulled his triggers as the other fighter attacked. Jerry let us have a couple of bursts, then whizzed over our tail. It was a miracle that "Bicarb's" fighter didn't fly right in through his window and out the other side."

Pappy was doing a little romanticizing. "Bicarb's" a funny guy. I don't know how many times I've got a good laugh out of him. Just think of it; every time a fighter comes in on him he gets sick to his stomach. He vomits unless he takes bicarbonate of soda."

A Lib makes up its glamour more in the fraternity of the crews than in any other sphere. "Bicarb" belonged to a crew who were really just kids from a home-town sand lot. This was even more obvious when you walked around their base—or rather waded around the place in the winter slush. The boys called it "the swamp." The swamp humour was that all-important peg in the wall that kept the losses from getting their spirits down.

Coots, still a new boy and substantially an outsider,

and as yet unIntroduced to Stevie, contributed to their conversation. "Getting back to 'Bicarb,' have you guys seen that complicated rig that he's fixed up? In the first place, he's got a bottle of bicarbonate strapped upside down over his head. Besides, he's got a home-made heater around his canteen to keep his water from freezing. The Bicarbonate, the canteen and a GI cup are all kept right handy. He showed me how he does it—a couple of quick tips, and then he just pushes his oxygen mask aside for a second or two, and takes a quick swig of his bicarbonate."

"Well," said Pappy to Coots, "However he does it, he's a good guy. To-day's about the first time he's missed a Jerry. He's about the best shot on the ship. Seven Jerries so far. A few more holes in 'Flak Alley' won't make any difference."

"Anyway," says Pappy, "Like I was telling you, Colonel Mac, up in front, cruised around hunting for a target after the other formations had given it up as a bad job. To make a long story short, he finally saw a good-looking bunch of smokestacks and cut the bombs loose."

"After 'bombs away' we turned tail for home. On the way back, McBride got shot up by flak crossing the Dutch coast. He dropped out of formation, but got home by taking it slow and flying a hop, skip and jump routine over the wave tops."

"Our No. 2 engine was out of action. A hunk of flak punched her out when we were passing over that target. She was oilin' up the atmosphere, all right,

but she was still flying! But definitely so! Then we came in off our wing and took the lead with the formation all screwed up. For a few minutes, we were doing that wandering-around business. That's when we hooked into more trouble. This madman Fritz, needled George."

"Aw, for Christ's sake, all I told him was that 'God knew where we were, even if he didn't, and his mind must've been doing a Red Cross routine with Dave's Marianne. You know, I've got a stinking notion that George is really nuts about Marianne. He got steamed up over nuthin' at all.' "

"Anyway, Ike," continued Pappy, "we had no more than got back over the English coast and were trying to figure where we were, when George pulls his oxygen mask off and comes up to my cockpit and hollers to me that he's very, very sorry that he got us lost. Mind you, he's crying like a baby. As a matter of fact, I was pretty damn sure where I was. But before I could say a word, George went back to the escape hatch, yanked it open and jumped out.

"Muscles," in the tail, reported George's chute opened okay and he was floating down beautifully.

I guess he's cooled off by now, wherever he is. But what a guy! What an idiot! What a screwball! He's sure a bad case of nerves. He's so high-strung I guess he just naturally went crackers. I told T.G. when he interrogated us that it would be a good idea if he sent somebody out in a jeep to look for him. He can't be more than a few miles over toward

the coast. He'll be all right, wherever he is, but he'll be damn peeved we aren't making a fuss over him.

"Anyway, about two minutes later, we ran completely out of gasoline—petrol if you want to be British about it. I put 'Flak Alley' right down in the middle of an apple orchard. I had little choice. I slid her down between a row of trees. Gee, I hope they find enough left to fix up."

"This is your birthday, Pappy," said Joe. "Come on and have another drink."

Joe didn't say to Pappy that they would never fly 'Flak Alley' again. It wasn't his place to tell a pilot anything about that sort of thing. Nevertheless that's what he thought. There was a strange psychology around the base. A ship that was marked down as "Jonah" seldom went on any more missions. There were exceptions, but for the average they scrapped them, or used the parts, or maybe they joined the ranks of the "hangar queens" and ended up as air taxicabs.

Another thing, of course, was that idea of *plenty*. If somebody got a bum piece of equipment that wouldn't operate properly, he'd put his hammer to work. Once it was properly busted, he'd be sure to get a new one, or at least know it would be fixed and no more chances taken. Hammer work was the best insurance against someone's forgetting to repair something you needed badly. Most C.O.s don't challenge the practice. For the most part it's good sense. Of course, if someone wanted to be nasty about it, he probably could make trouble. But a

guy who gets shot at has a few rights. Everyone agreed on that.

It doesn't take long for thoughts to pass through your mind *en route* nowhere. Joe pocketed all this thinking as Pappy answered.

"You're not fooling, Joe. Here I go again. Divide the men from the boys! Here's one guy who is going to keep you all company. Come on, let's have that drink. Pour it deep!"

Stevie poured whiskies for Pappy, Fritz Ike and Coots. For Joe and himself, he went into the other room with two GI mugs to draw beer.

When Stevie came back, Ike introduced Coots.

"I don't think you two know each other." Stevie and Coots shook hands, and words went back and forth. Things like meetings and partings were not too serious. Anyway, not around here. Being glum would make things very difficult with all the comings and goings. Guys just said, "Hello," or "Howdy mate" or "See you later."

"Stevie," Ike said, "Coots had his first mission to-day, and he is now fully qualified to join the Suckers Club Limited, East Anglia branch."

Stevie responded beautifully, and at his best, said:

"Well, here's to Sucker No. 22,210. My friend, you're in."

They all drank.

CHAPTER VIII

As Stevie sat educating his imagination and gently sipping whiskey, he amused himself with thoughts of how a Yank's capacity for alcohol expanded in England. Strange, but it never seemed to affect you until your score reached a quart or better! It must have been the dampness—everybody around the countryside said the dampness was responsible for a lot of things. It might be that you took in so much weather that the liquor was diluted and you simply couldn't get drunk. Too weak a mixture! Weather in England provided a constant excuse for letting off steam and other by-products of discontent. One GI wrote home, "To-day the sun came out for a change. But the clouds came out, too—they were afraid they might miss something."

Pappy broke Stevie's trance.

"All right, Stevie, I've drunk up. Now about Dave—I think Dave needs a rest, but he really deserves anything he gets. He's just slam-bang out of his head."

"You and Stevie have nothing to do with Dave's case except to poke your faces into other people's business as usual," Ike broke in. "I'm saddled with him. What's more, I've already made up my mind, if it interests you two."

Ike was taking no chances. There were too many people in on the thing. It should be talked over behind closed doors, if at all. Better not at all.

Stevie always set scenes for undiplomatic situations. Yet Stevie said he didn't want any talk.

"What's been decided, Ike?"

"Simply this." Then, before Ike could say another word, the hut was filled with that impossible noise.

"Attention all Personnel. Attention all Personnel. Special Christmas boxes of candy fresh from the States are on sale at the Post Exchange for a limited time only. Come early. Get your ration. Over."

"Next thing you know they'll be using that cursed Tannoy to advertise the 'crouched leopards' in Piccadilly," Ike complained.

"They call them 'tarts' in England, Ike, but back in my home town they call those full time illicit lovers untouchables. For me there isn't much of a thrill going out with a girl who moves like an animal but has less sex than a fox."

Joe felt someone ought to cheer up a little. But his would-be wisecracks fell flat. Ike had only scowled at him.

"I'll get serious, if you masterminds will allow me. You'd never think anything is ever serious around here. All just smart guys, aren't you?"

"Take it easy, Ike," Fritz butted in again. "To begin with there really ain't nothin' so serious that I can't have another nip of this here whiskey, is there? Godle 'mighty you guys can work out more ways to pout and be uncomfortable than anybody I've ever met, so help me God!" Fritz was being fresh. Pappy cut him short.

"Shut up, Fritz. I hate to interrupt Ike, but I

have something to say and I'm going to get it off my chest. I'd like to tell you my version of this business."

"Oh don't mind me," said Ike sourly.

"Well, in a way I blame Dave, and in another way I don't. I don't know what Stevie said, and I don't know exactly how you feel about it, but I think we ought to take it easy. Mind you, give Dave a good scare! But to my way of thinkin' bravery is merely the simple result of distraction. Nobody is really an unchallengeable chestbeater—they do their bit under the influence of circumstances. It would be profitable business if you just know how to create those proper circumstances, or if a guy could go around 'circumstancing' flyers, so they could win their decorations more easily.

"I suppose being in a foreign country doesn't help to make a fellow any more brave. Here we are, many, many, miles from home, along the banks of a strange river I think of as the river 'Time' where loves have no names and yesterday, well, yesterday's a beautiful thing. To-day we are just transients—maybe to heaven, maybe not. But to-morrow, is the real thing—almost immortal, like sky. Maybe that's because to-morrow is the place guys store their hopes in. I believe to-morrow or some day soon Dave will go back to flying. Sooner or later he will, then he'll be sorry for this whole affair. But most of the guys around the base are not going to be sorry for him. That part of it may hurt Dave for a long, long time to come."

As Pappy finished, Ike knew that he spoke the

mind of his boys. They would agree with his decision despite all the trash to the contrary. It's amazing how quickly change for the good can alter attitudes. You'd think nothing ever had gone awry when Ike broke out talking.

"Listen, chump," Ike lectured Pappy; "Don't get sentimental over Dave. I have recommended that the C.O. assign him to censorship. I'm counting on you guys to help him pull himself together. Let's quit talking about it."

No one said anything but Pappy—fellows who fly don't like being grateful to ground officers. "Hogs," they call them. Pappy said simply, "Thanks, Ike."

There were reasons only crews understand as to why Dave had quit. Bomber combat crews get queer mental fixations. When a guy gets a fixation or an idea about anything it isn't always erased easily. Fixations are tricky things. Your mind gets caught on an idea and refuses to budge. For instance, the men around the base all knew they suffered from fixations which the flight surgeons called neurosis. When they were 20,000 feet over Germany and the flak was busting, anyone would tell you that he could smell cordite. Yet when they stopped to think about it, they knew it was impossible to smell anything through an oxygen mask.

When you went screwy and began to exercise your imagination too much, you did things that seemed superfluous, silly, unnecessary things.

Another point was that when the flak burst near, you wanted it to hit you. Yes, you wanted the flak

to hit you. It was something like standing on the top of a sky-scraper and having a feeling you would like to jump off. Of course, a second later you felt a damned fool. But with flak it's different—you keep on having the same reaction over and over again. Flak has a horrifying fascination.

These things fill the subconscious thoughts of flyers. One antidote is good old fashioned singing—that was one reason all the boys liked B.O.Q. dash 201. Joe's banjo helped a lot.

A very delicate silence was cancelled out by the squawk box. "*Attention all Personnel. Attention all Personnel. The post Exchange is happy to announce the arrival of a new stock of good-luck charms! Everyone should own a charm. We have rabbits' feet on watch chains! We have dried skunk ears! That is all. Over.*"

"That takes the cake," Joe clichéd. I simply don't know the whyfore of all these superstitions that keep going around this base." Stevie took up the pivoting conversation and led it on.

"Superstitions are amazing things. I asked one of my sergeants, who said he wasn't superstitious, why he was carrying a good-luck charm. He stopped me cold by saying, 'But Captain, I'm really not superstitious, I'm just playing safe.'"

Pappy horned in: "Superstitions add a little intrigue and they give a chance for some creative work on your own.

"You know my radio operator, Benito the Bookie? Well, he decided after his first mission that he'd do

everything the same as he did on his first trip. So now he always carries three cigars. He smokes one while he's waiting for the briefing, chews another before the takeoff, and saves the last one to smoke when he gets his feet onto that good old solid ground again ! ”

“ Nuts. Cigars aren't charms,” said Ike. “ A rabbit's foot, yes. But I wouldn't trust *my* luck to any stogie. No cheap cigars for this baby ! ‘Bicarb,’ now, carries a carved ivory charm tied with a bit of parachute cord. That's my kind of country.”

“ But you take me, for instance,” Fritz interjected ; “ I figure that it's good sense to wear the same fightin' clothes you wore on your first trip without washing 'em or anything. Lots of guys do. You know everything just the same ! Washing might change my luck. And they've still got a lot more trips to go ! What gets me is flight surgeons always preaching about clean clothes. It's all right for them to blabber on the ground ; they don't have to be superstitious.”

“ What are you carrying in the way of a charm, Pappy ? ” Coots asked. Coots was very anxious to make good right down to the last line of advice. In fact, he was “ advice-collecting.”

“ I crashed during training, Coots. It was my first ‘donkey heap’ and nobody even got scratched ! Pretty lucky. I picked up a bolt stud from the wreckage. That's my only charm.”

“ I never knew you to admit you didn't have charm, Pappy. You'll probably pile up, too, unless

you get something more than that. Better buy a PX rabbit's foot."

"Quit jiggling your teeth, Fritz. Anyhow I'm really not superstitious. A guy gets a lot of real pleasure out of just nourishing a good-luck piece. There are bad-luck charms too, I guess. The other day I walked up to the sergeant in charge of the flying clothes. He was carefully cutting a leather jacket into shreds with a razor blade —

" 'Hey,' I said, 'What goes on? That looks like a good jacket.'

"He continued his slashing with the razor blade. 'A lot of things look good,' he said, 'but they really aren't.'

"He held about thirty strips of leather in his hand, about an inch wide and carefully put the zipper he had removed into a box with several others. 'That jacket,' he said, as he piled the strips of leather on top of each other, 'is just no good. I saw it first about six months ago. The gunner it belonged to didn't wear it on a single mission and when he didn't return we picked it up from his locker and issued it to another fellow. Yesterday we found it in a locker for the sixth time. Six men have been issued with that jacket, and six times we've found it in a locker assigned to a man who didn't return. That jacket just isn't any good.'

"I was a little skeptical. 'How do you know it was the same jacket? What makes you so sure that this isn't one that was never issued to anyone else?'

"He took the strips of leather and carefully pieced

about five together so that there was an expanse of about six inches. 'The first man was issued this jacket to put that on there. And it's been on ever since.'

"The razor strips, put back into place, showed a chalk-white skull and crossbones.

"He opened the doors to the stove and threw the leather strips onto the hot coals. An acrid, nauseating stench filled the little room. We walked outside and breathed deeply in the fresh air.

" 'Some jackets,' he said, 'are just no good.' "

" *Attention all personnel. Attention all personnel. Air Raid Warning. Red. Air Raid Warning. Red. The ground defense officer will report to Headquarters at once. Over.* "

The loudspeaker no sooner clicked off than the telephone rang. Stevie answered :

"Stevie talking. Yes, Marshall, we know about the air raid. Yes, what can I do for you ? " Stevie leaned against the wall listening. Robert Marshall, a flight lieutenant, was the R.A.F. liaison officer attached to the base. His father had owned the large country estate which the R.A.F. had converted into an airfield and turned over to the U.S. Air Forces. His sister was Claire, who helped Marianne at the Red Cross Club—the Aero Club. Her younger brother was stationed nearby, and flew over Naziland in Lancasters. The family were three.

"All right, Marshall : sure I will. If Claire gets here before you do, I'll see that she waits. Yes. See you later."

Stevie laid the 'phone down. Turning around, he explained, "You all remember Marshall's brother who visited last week-end. Well, he didn't come back from the Berlin trip last night."

Coots didn't remember the brother, but the rest knew the young officer. Stevie continued: "Marshall just said that Claire was meeting him here. We're to keep our traps shut until he gets over."

"In a couple of minutes." Ike shook his head wearily, "We're going to have the most lovely party. This is gonna to be no place for a sane man."

"Attention all personnel. Attention all personnel. Twenty-five enemy aircraft are reported in the vicinity. Twenty-five enemy aircraft are reported in the vicinity. Check all blackouts. Over."

The telephone rang again. Ike raised his voice above a thousand echoes.

"B.O.Q. dash 201. What can I do for you?" Pausing, he went on, "Yes, T.G., for God's sake we *know* there's an air raid on. Yes, I know. Yes, Say, listen. That damn loudspeaker has nearly driven us crazy with all the clatter! We are all on the point of leaving. Thanks for calling. Goodbye."

But before Ike could lay down the receiver, T.G. yelled back through the 'phone. "Leaving for where?"

"Oh, nowhere in particular," Ike answered dryly. "Just anywhere outdoors where you can get peace and quiet. Claire and probably Marianne as well are coming around. Unless I miss my guess Marianne is due to start trouble, but we're ready with

our axes and arrows ! Claire has already got all the trouble she can handle. She doesn't know it yet, Marshall called in to say her brother didn't come back from that Berlin trip last night. We are supposed to latch onto her kidnap style, and keep her here until Marshall arrives."

T.G. wasn't interested in Marianne but he was very interested in Claire. He lowered his voice, "I'll be right over."

"What's T.G. spouting about, Ike ?"

"Oh, not much. You heard what I said. He's coming over. He wants to see Claire. I forgot to ask whether we're charted for a mission. Pappy may have to fly one of those hangar queens," Ike replied.

"Christ, I hope not. I hate those Queens." Pappy had just about one normal bellyful of flying for the minute. Ike continued.

"Down at headquarters they're thinking in terms of a certain number of targets hit before the Invasion or whatever they want to call the deadline on this 'softening' war we are waging. Our interest is in crews. But down at H.Q. all they ask is how many flyable planes got back. Anyway, what's the difference, Pappy, all the new Libs are about the same, aren't they ?"

"Not so you could notice it. Each ship takes getting acquainted with. That's why pilots like practice missions. Crews always gripe their heads off about our wasting time on practice missions, but

I suppose there's no good reason why we shouldn't take a ride in a new crate."

"They're all the same to me," said Fritz. "Riding a new ship is like riding a prostitute. Afterwards, you're right back where you started from!"

"Thank God, bombardiers don't have to know about spiritual things," said Pappy, "You stick to your bomb-droppin' and I'll figure out the rest."

"Well, you guys figure out what you please," said Stevie. "The fact is, I'm more interested in Claire. I don't know just how she is going to take this brother business."

Stevie liked Claire, and would have liked her more if he could have slowed down that incessant flow of ideas that kept running through his mind. It was like madness. No one in his family ever had been committed to an institution—but he was having a hard time keeping his thoughts from running all together and messing up his thinking. There was that frightening nervousness and that being jumpy all day and night. His work wasn't the snap of a job that some people thought intelligence officers had. How could he get interested in girls in such a state. Not fun. He knew Ike agreed. How else could they have got along so well?

Stevie opened his mouth to say something, but the words came out of the Tannoy instead.

"Attention all personnel. Attention all personnel. Forty-six enemy aircraft are reported in the vicinity. Please take caution. Repeat. Forty-six enemy aircraft are reported in the vicinity. Over."

There was an example. Noise. You could just about begin to think about something, but you never could finish. The show was on. Must go on. Did go on. You were allowed to think between acts only. He gave up any attempt at serious thinking and sat down at the table.

Stevie started shuffling cards, and handed the glasses off the table to Fritz.

“There’s just time for a quick hand of bridge. How about you, Pappy?”

Pappy sat down at the table opposite Stevie, with Coots and Ike as their opponents. Joe threw his leg over a wooden box and started to strum his banjo. Fritz perched on the arm of Coots’ chair, was ready to give advice to anybody.

“Okay, let’s get started. You dealt, Pappy, what are you bidding?”

“Open with a heart.”

After a finesse, a seven of diamonds in Stevie’s hand took the final trick for game and rubber. Coots pushed his chair back and stood up.

“Thanks for the lesson, Captain ‘Culbertson,’” he said. “I’m out of my class with you chairborne experts who don’t have anything to do but practice while I’m out war-winning. Besides, I’ve got to write a letter. How much do I owe? Let’s get over to the club before the sandwiches are gone.”

Coots felt superfluous. He was doing things people noticed, and he wasn’t enjoying it. He was thinking about dead people and the people still living—himself

in particular. That embarrassing noticer, Fritz, began outguessing him.

"So you're all walkin' out," he bellowed. "So nobody can take a tear or two. What if somebody did die! Who cares! Jesus H. Christ! What the hell did you expect him to do in this business, live forever? The R.A.F. get their dead and so do we. Anyhow, have you ever seen anybody leave this world alive?"

There was no answer to that sort of talk. It brought up problems and problems which didn't always find solutions in this place. Especially this kind of problem. England had been the beginning of this outfit, not the end. The easiest way, and, generally, the usual procedure, was to walk out on such conversations. But Coots was learning.

Pappy got on his feet. His only remark was, "See you after sandwiches." Coots, Joe, and, reluctantly, Fritz, followed.

CHAPTER IX

STEVIE pulled his shirttails out of his pants and laid them neatly across his lap and said to Ike. "Well, I think I am going to be comfortable for a change. Air raids or no air raids, I've just about *had* this place, and frankly, I admit I'm fed up."

Whenever Stevie and Ike got together this way, they felt that fraternity of "downlook" which their age afforded them, but their play with emotion was stopped.

"Attention all personnel. Attention all personnel. Sixty enemy aircraft are now reported in the vicinity. Repeat. Sixty enemy aircraft are now reported in the vicinity. You are advised to take cover. Over."

As the squawk box became silent, Claire's voice came through the door. "If you're not dressed, hide, I'm coming in." Then Claire Marshall stepped into the hut. She must have felt like a dentist looking down two throats at once, for in an embarrassed voice she half-apologetically began the conversation.

"I hope I'm not interrupting you two heroes."

There was a forced silence for a couple of seconds, then Stevie pulled a chair toward the table. "Sit, Claire," he boomed. Stevie was afraid an unnatural reception might bring too many questions. Of course, they were thinking about her. And she was thinking about Dave. Each was afraid of being made to say something wrong.

"Look, child," Stevie began, "how have you been doing to-day?"

Ike's months as Stevie's backfield mate in the outfit came to the rescue. He, too, thrust shop talk at Claire.

"You two somehow don't seem very normal," said Claire shaking her head slowly and suspiciously. "Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Never gladder, my little Anglo-American relation." Then Stevie rushed to explain as if giving up trying to hide anything from a woman. "Nothin' much wrong! Besides to-day we really need your sunshine, honey. It's been a helluva day. Dave refused to fly this morning. The boys got lost over Germany. The C.O. got shot up with flak. Pappy's navigator went screwy on the way home and jumped. Pappy crashed in an apple orchard. The latest verse is that we have to face Marianne. She's on the warpath about Dave. Outside of that everything seems to be serene and story-bookish."

"Over at the Club Marianne mumbled something about Dave," Claire said. "She was pretty much stirred up. I couldn't make out what she was trying to tell me."

"Attention all personnel. Attention all personnel. There are seventy-five enemy aircraft reported in the vicinity. There are seventy-five enemy aircraft reported in the vicinity. All personnel are warned to use the utmost caution. Over."

With the complete abandon of school kids, the

three settled down to talk that excluded any possibility of interruption.

"That's what we're worried about. I wish to God she'd mind her own business instead of complicating Dave! It's bad enough, actually he's a plain case of businessman's nerves."

Stevie, who was doing a little hand-rubbing and fast thinking, said, "I think I've got the answer to a lot of things."

"Answer to what things?" queried Ike, raising his voice.

"I believe I've got an idea that'll work, but it involves Claire." Looking Claire in the eye Stevie pulled his chair over beside hers. "Claire, if you'll play I think I know how to get Dave round to his right senses. In the first place, for my dough, he needs a little of your pub treatment. How about taking him under your wing?"

"What! And go into physical combat with Marianne? Not me, funny boy."

It was obvious Claire was not anxious to get mixed up in a cat-and-cat fight with Marianne. She'd seen frustrated women before. After all, England had a too-many-female problem after the last war. The estate provided headaches enough.

In Stevie's mind his idea had two virtues. First, he would get Claire interested in something to lessen her mourning for her brother, and secondly she probably could and would help Dave.

It made things all the easier that everyone around the base liked Claire. She was a good sport. Even

the GI's had worked up a hillbilly band so that Claire could have her Americanese delivered to her front door. Besides, her presence made the officer class feel absolutely respectable.

Claire represented practically the only goodness and sweetness the boys knew of English life. Most of the girls they met when they came to England were not the nicest girls. The flight surgeon shocked them when they first arrived. He said, "The kind of gal you'd date for the Saturday Club dance at home goes to roost over here with Mom and Dad at blackout time. When you get in town, the only girls left are those who use the blackout to make proper introductions unnecessary. So take precautions!" Then he had explained what he meant by taking precautions. The warning was so sordid that the guys had developed a "the hell with it; it ain't worth it" attitude. More and more they had settled down on the base to private drinking, letter-writing and gambling.

With loneliness almost as much an enemy as the Luftwaffe, one of Claire's great contributions had been to introduce life in the local village. Instead of being bored the boys found a healthy satisfaction in associating with people whose troubles and joys were about the same as theirs. They were good for the village, too. They chipped in plenty of pounds and bought a blitz-kid an artificial leg. A boy was sent to school. A couple of orphans were being cared for out of their fund. And Claire's smile trimmed with lots of gratitude, made giving fun.

They liked to answer those thanks with, "Listen babe, it ain't nuthin', nuthin' at all. Wait until you see the pot after payday."

The village, Claire knew, was okay. It was the kind of English village that smelled of oak and looked at you with a ruddy face. It was a poor people's town.

The pub seemed to be the center of everything. Yes, the village in the valley had its heart in the pub and its tongue in the open! They talked their minds in pubs! At first some of the GIs. had misunderstood the way of pub-talking. They had not been a credit to the base or themselves; but they learned quick enough. GIs. went to London and the bigger places too. But they missed the real England which was no more than a hundred yards from the sentry post.

The village also offered all the comedy needed to keep their spirits high, and all the tragedy to keep them human. This was England all right. The whole place seemed to revolve around two persons. Each base had its own village and each village its own big shots. They usually were the pub keeper and the local Bobby. For most Americans this was new. Back home bartenders certainly were not the best citizens.

The village pub on their common was kept by an aristocratic looking chap. The boys sometimes forgot themselves and bowed to British class custom by calling him 'Sir.' Of course, even in England the class folks don't call pubs licensees "Sir." But in a

way we're strangers, so what's a little mix-up between Allies ?

You see to call a civie, "sir," is really a bad mistake when you're in the Army. Civies are supposed to be sissies. You can imagine the shock the GIs. got when they learned that the civilian bartender often had to preach sermons, bury the dead, and even pray over the sick.

Moreover the pub had its own Christmas Saving scheme and had organized a little Social Club, where there were ninety-three members. They were as active as if the whole war depended on them. Why not ? Life in England certainly did depend on them. And this was England.

Of course, this wasn't the England of titles, or of power-seekers or of empire-builders. This was the England of the country folk who, worse luck, made the others possible.

Claire knew countrified England best. She learned to understand the boys who fitted into her pastoral scene, and she was indeed the Anglo-American relation of Milford Common. On those occasional evenings when Claire joined the gang at the pub there was much quiet talk. Claire gave them a vast and interesting fund of local gossip, and drew from them stories of home. They were good evenings. Seven and a ha' penny for beer, and one setup for Mr. Bidewell, the local dart champion.

Ike felt that perhaps Stevie had struck on a good idea. It was worth a try. He drew his chair up on the opposite side of Claire and the two "old" men

started pressuring her. Like a modern saga of John Alden, Ike began.

"Now Claire, aren't you being a little too quick with this decision about Dave? Why not join Stevie and me and try to be constructive? Not much required—just see that he gets no time to spend alone or with Marianne. A good clean time with ample rest."

Stevie hardly gave Claire a chance to think as he carried on the attack. "I don't know which is worse, Marianne or his being lonely—but we ought to have a plan. Now I suggest that we try to get Marianne transferred off the base. That ought to be your job, Ike. I'll get the guys to lay off Dave, while Claire gets him to go pubbing with her." Stevie felt it was a good plan but it still left Claire in an embarrassing position.

"But who keeps Marianne off me? And when do we start? And why should I do your dirty work?"

Ike answered with all the persuasiveness he could command. "Be a good sport, sweetheart, and give a couple of old boys a hand. I'll try getting Marianne transferred. But any fast repartee with Marianne is up to you, Stevie."

"Okay, Ike—count me in." Claire agreed. But she still was not happy about it all. "Well, it looks as if I'm hooked, and I'll probably get hung by my hair, but I'll play."

Now there were other things to be talked about. Who else could they count on? Perhaps T.G., Joe

and Pappy. Stevie would have to keep the talk to a minimum if that was humanly possible.

They went on talking. They went on planning. After about half an hour they'd finally worked out a scheme.

Smiling, Claire began to change the subject and punctuate their ideas. "Well," she said, "it won't be long now before our boy, Dave, will know what it feels like to be a guinea-pig."

"Unless I miss my guess, this little guinea-pig of ours is going to be pretty busy," said Ike; "that is, of course, if everything goes according to plan."

"I never heard a guinea-pig complain," countered Stevie. "Anyway, if we are smart, this little guinea-pig is not going to know that he's the object of our affection." Almost as if scheduled to arrive at that very moment, Robert Marshall entered the door quietly and unannounced.

"Good evening," said Bob. The greeting was certainly exactly what you might expect a British flight lieutenant to say.

Then after a very informal routine of "Howdy's!" Bob Marshall motioned to Claire, saying, "Can I see you a minute, Claire?" Claire and Bob went into the sleeping room to talk while Stevie and Ike prepared themselves to offer condolences hoping Claire would understand how they both felt. They were not clever at offering condolences.

"Attention all personnel. Attention all personnel. Hot news from Home. The New York Giants beat the St. Louis Cardinals 3 to 1 in a special game at

Miami Beach, Florida. Repeat. The New York Giants beat the St. Louis Cardinals 3 to 1 in a special game at Miami Beach, Florida. Warning anybody running a 'book' will catch it. Over."

Ike knew his baseball. In fact as a small town surgeon and peanut eater, he liked baseball from start to finish. As a matter of fact, he had some money on the Giants. Ike had a bet with T.G.

One long blast of the siren followed the 'hot news.' But everybody was more interested in the ball game than the air raid. The squawk box switched on again :

"Attention all personnel. Attention all personnel. Air raid warning white. Air raid warning white. Over."

"That reminds me, Stevie, T.G. said he'd be over. Where is he? He's going to owe me some real money over this little ball game. It will cost him!"

"Don't let your mouth overload you, Ike. I'm right behind you," said T.G. struggling out of his overcoat. He had come into the hut as Ike spoke.

"So you get your fiver all right, but what I want to know is, where is Claire?"

"Claire's in the other room talking to Bob," Stevie replied. "He's telling her about their brother."

Stevie automatically poured T.G. a whiskey.

In reality, Claire had been prepared mentally for losing her next of kin for a long time. Everyone in England, yes everyone, particularly in this part of the country, was used to that kind of shock. It

came as no surprise. Friends sent condolences. No flowers.

Ike found himself talking for want of something better to say. No one was hearing. They were waiting.

The sleeping room door opened. Claire opened it. She was consciously feeling her way along, testing each step.

In a resounding voice, T.G. said, "Good evening, honey." Then adding rather foolishly, "Is there anything wrong?"

"Wrong?" Claire almost returned the question, then catching herself and literally hauling her mind back to direct words she repeated herself. "Wrong?" she said, "it does seem wrong. My brother didn't come back from the Berlin trip last night. But, you know, he's been very fortunate for almost three years now. In a way I'm grateful for those three years. We had a lot of fun together, we three. If you boys don't mind I think I'll excuse myself now and go home with Bob. Don't forget our plan Stevie. I'll come over to see Dave in the morning. Until then be good boys."

Stevie emptied the last of the whiskey into T.G.'s glass. Sitting down again he picked up his beer, then with a certain convincing finality he said. "Well, T.G., there's plenty of beer after you've finished that whiskey. But the straight dope is that we might as well enjoy this war—the peace is going to be terrible!"

CHAPTER X

WA-WA's stove was cherry red. He had been ordered to stoke up. There was a rumour going the rounds that any day now this Liberator group would be moved off to China. Ike had decided to pre-condition himself for Asia ; and obedient Wa-Wa, so intent on following Ike's word to the letter, already had melted down three tin chimneys.

Claire sat reading in B.O.Q. dash 201. She was enjoying the comfort and warmth, after being rationed on coal so frugally. Her family might like lots of fresh air and dankness, but she agreed with the Americans—a big blaze wasn't really wasteful. A fire can warm more than just your outside.

Ike entered the room quietly. He looked like a traveller, with a greasy, stale face. It was obvious he hadn't shaved the liquor off his cheeks from the night before, and he had been worrying too much again. His entrance and debooting had failed to disturb Claire's reading. Ike, somewhat perplexed at her intentness, stood behind Claire's chair, then began in a mood of affectionate teasing :

" Well, Claire, why all the classroom concentration ? I didn't know you could read, anyway. And, incidentally, where were you this morning ? I thought you were coming to see Dave."

Claire looked up as if from sleep. " Sorry, Ike," she said. " I simply didn't hear you. Last night I went home and got to thinking about Dave. It

was easier to think about him than to try to adjust my mind to a future without a brother. He always made me feel somewhat a queen in my own surroundings. I always felt Bob, being older, could take care of himself, but having a younger brother stimulated me to things I am sure I wouldn't have done otherwise. I know it sounds awfully un-British and feminine, but I shall miss him, and that's that."

"Yes," Ike said. Then changing his tone and picking up his voice from its lower baritone, attempted to lift both Claire and himself from their conversation.

"But what I don't understand is your getting so wrapped up in this book."

"Well, to tell the truth, Ike. I have been reading this book on psychology that I found this morning at our village library. And after all, Ike dear, I read books—I don't just look for the dirty words."

"I didn't know they used dirty words in psycho-analysis."

Claire pouted in reply. Then crinkling a smile, she went on to explain: "I've only been trying to get educated, Ike. I thought perhaps I could understand Dave a little better if I knew what happens to someone who has one of these nervous breakdowns."

Ike started to say something, and then only stammered. He stopped to think. Claire laid the book down, and pressing her toes against the floor, stretched like a kitten. Ike knew Claire wanted words—she wanted instruction and explanation. She wanted, as we all want, that push that attention gives.

"Since I came to England I've changed a lot."

"Yes, I know you have, Ike."

"Well, I've worked out a tin-can philosophy. I've dreamed and dreamed and thought about it all. Where strangeness breeds—fear breeds fear—but a human's heart that beats and pounds can always reconstruct itself from this fear. I believe that. The calling of the halt, the reconstruction of a situation is one way of defining the character of a strong man's virtue, and the failing to be able to pull out of such a rut of fear, is the other man's apparent sin.

"In the days of ye olde knights and serpents they defined the throwing off of fear as a search for a grail, or for holiness, or answering a clarion call. To-day we flight surgeons know how to help the 'sinner man' by administering drugs that relax the body so completely that even the tiny muscles of the spine let go and, from a fresh beginning, add all the component parts of thinking into a new design for living."

"That's a lovely way to explain it, Ike. I've never heard a surgeon's heart talk before, but I'm sure that your heart was talking to these boys."

"Thanks, Claire. I guess you know me as well as I know myself. I guess I've lost a lot of petty bitterness since I came abroad. I used to think of breakdowns as pretty silly routines. I've changed my mind, now ; I know better."

"Well, you see, Ike, last night as I started to tell you I began thinking and wonder ng about how Dave

came to be so frightened. I even went around to see another flight surgeon I know at the R.A.F. Hospital about twenty miles from here. He told me a lot of things. The most interesting part of it all to me is that very few of our boys are really motivated to breakdown by the actual flying. It always seems to be the outside arguments, outside interference, outside hate and love."

"That's about it," said Ike. "It is outside, a lot of it. And that's what makes it so terribly hard sometimes to figure just what's wrong with this kind of case. Dave's mental process is made up of a series of things that have occurred in his life, and which normally he can't remember. It all starts, in a technical sense, the first day he takes off to Germany. But, in fact, taking off to Germany is only the last straw that causes the breakdown. At home, flying is glamorous and there is no enemy, no flak, and no fighters. Here it's more difficult to conquer fear if the mind is filled with troubles and worries from home. At home, if Dave got scared he probably was just scared of flying, and he got over it. In England it's in vogue to admit you're scared, and the very admission of fear is not too healthy.

"Then you get a second sort of phase, or the beginning of an internal argument inside yourself. I know this argument, for only last night I fought a battle of conflicting ideas. Regardless of what the mental argument is about, any conflict produces worry, and the worry, unsolved, makes for a com-

plexity which affords a stimulus, setting up waves of extreme mental depression and exaltation. This is when boys drink too much. The next day they suffer not only from a hangover, but from mental depression as well.

"The blocked and disordered mind then refuses to function properly, and the muscular system, so tightened, makes you sleepless, appetiteless and jittery. This all makes you think backwards. You keep looking back into the past. What I can't figure out is Dave's past. I hope we can get Marianne away from here within the next couple of days. I had a long argument with the C.O. this morning, and the final outcome was that he has agreed to request London to send her to another base."

"But what are we going to do, Ike? What am I going to do? What are you going to do?"

"Well, Claire, that's a pretty hard question to answer. To begin with, last night I hoped we could send Dave over to your place, give him a rest for about a week, and that would do the trick. But to-day Dave has acted very queerly. He's not in his right mind; besides, he had a few too many drinks last night. The boys believe he's still drunk, but I know better. I don't want to send him down to London to be reclassified, and that means I'm going to have to reach in my back pocket for a cure. I'm a little afraid Dave will come out hardened and with a chemical mind. But anything is better than disgrace."

"Does that mean that you'll still want him to come to my house, or not?" Claire asked.

"Well, I've been thinking about that, too, Claire," said Ike. "I believe so." Ike hesitated for a few minutes, and then went on:

"Yes, I'd like to take him over to your place to-night, Claire. I've lived and worked with these combat crews for so long that I'm sure Dave will have confidence in me. I don't know whether you know, Claire, the routine flight surgeons have to go through.

"I'm always on the watch for fear. Fear is a peculiar trait, for it's more stimulating than any other human feeling. You see that so clearly in the mornings before the boys go out on their missions. There is that fear of getting lost, of the aircraft's developing mechanical defects and the possibility of a parachute's not opening properly. It's this sort of thing on your mind that develops anxiety states, or trends. Fundamentally, there is no organic stimulant for fear. Of course, escapism sometimes is responsible.

"I'm with them from wake-up time in the morning until they drop into bed at night. About four o'clock in the morning, or earlier, I get up and go to the picket house, where the crews check in before they go off on their missions. I eat breakfast with them. I go to the briefing with them. I watch the take-off. I watch them come back. I help them check their equipment to see that they have the proper electric suits and so forth. Do you know, some people

absolutely need equipment where others can do without? With electric equipment, some boys can stand any degree of cold, but without it they easily catch pneumonia. Others are tougher.

"I have some of the best equipment in the world on this place. I have a radio-car, an ambulance; we can give blood plasma, or splint legs very quickly. That part of my job is not my chief worry. It's this grounding and ungrounding and restoring to flying that's difficult."

"A very interesting thing," Ike offered, "is the contrast between our boys who are flying Forts and Libs and those fighter pilots. The other day I was talking to one of the control tower officers on that fighter base near here. He had a long song and dance about fighter pilots and their psychology. To understand them, he said, you had to realise they had started their training with the general idea that they were going out to the South Pacific, and that the risk in air combat was a personal proposition for them to anticipate. In other words, they were to do or die.

"Most of the boys, before they had come to England, thought of our bombers as merely flying freight cars prosaically delivering goods without very much risk. The fighter pilot, seems to read more potential 'glammer' into his job, and not only pooh-poohs the bomber crew because of their heavier craft, but actually believes the bomber's part is the lesser one. According to him fighter pilots can't understand how anyone wanted to fly or wanted to be

anything else but a fighter pilot. To say that they were 'hopped up' was putting it mildly.

"Only a few dropped by the wayside during operational training. For these few, the speed, the thrill of being one with, and master of, seven tons of airplane became too weighty a responsibility. This responsibility caused conflicts and rationalisation. This, in turn, reduced the potential 'glammer' and it became much less than enough to stimulate them in their job. Hence they asked either to be transferred to slower craft, or their flying suffered. They develop imaginary illnesses, sometimes resulting in mental cases, but more often in malingering. Those boys never came abroad. Most of the boys who did come to England were young and most made a fetish of independence. There was that half-conscious notion among them, and among the people responsible for their training, that a certain amount of recklessness and a devil-may-care attitude was a thing to be fostered and encouraged. When they arrived in England, they all felt that they had to strike out and show the world what tough guys they were by getting drunk and fighting with the cops and buzzing the control towers. Gambling and swagger became vogue.

During this time our bomber outfits were acquiring a sense of responsibility and teamwork. But such teamwork wasn't a part of the conditioning program for the fighter pilot. They got a kick out of improving a steady hand on a wing-over. Only when the hours to their credit mounted they became aware of the

hell that their big friends had gone through before their escorting fighters came to help. This was the first definite evidence that their mission was not one of shining individual glory, but would demand some kind of altruistic co-operation on operations that they'd jeered as unglamorous. They had much less reason for jeering than the bomber crews, but they still carried over from their training days the attitude of individualism and developed ego. As the pattern of their activities became more clear and the outlook for survival of the operations improved, their responsibility for their aircraft increased.

At first too many fighter pilots lost their mental equilibrium. Why, one fellow had an idea that he could rescue the boys who had to jump, and were floating down to earth in their straps. He maintained you could grab the parachute straps with the grappling hook and tow crewmen back to England. Then, he would add, "you could have another plane come along underneath and pick the fellow off his flying trapeze." He got pretty mad when he was laughed at. To his mind it could be done.

The Tannoy resumed the conversation as it was slipping away off their base.

"Attention please. Attention please. Will Captain Ike Cramer ring Extension Two? Repeat. Will Captain Cramer ring Extension Two? Over."

Ike got up and called. It was his efficient but makeshift hospital. Somebody had a running nose. As Ike laid the receiver down, Stevie burst into the hut.

"What are you two doing ? " he demanded.

" I'm jealous, in fact, I'm damned jealous." And then, jesting, he added, " After all, Claire, I think I'm in love, and according to my own calculation it's probably you."

" Don't use words you don't understand, Stevie," said Claire.

" But I do understand," said Stevie, by now practically shouting. " And even if I didn't understand, it sounds pretty nice—keeps me from being lonely."

" You're not in a taxicab, Stevie. Anyway, I love everybody around here."

" Remember me, you big wonderful man," Ike said sarcastically. " I'm the guy that's going to make a capsule-kid out of your Dave."

" What's all this you're going to do, Ike ? "

" Well, I'm going to try the ' assembly-line ' repair method. First I'm going to try the ' truth drug ' and dig up something out of Dave's distant past, which has contributed to this condition. He seems to be getting worse to-day, rather than better, and I don't think he's going to respond to any common method of treatment. He's seen a lot of horror for five missions, and I think he blames himself for a lot of things Dave has a guilt complex of some sort. I'm going to give him a little amytal first. In the twilight state which precedes a deep slumber from this drug, I think I can get his whole story. In other words, what I've got to do is to figure out just what's in this guy's mind. When I get the whole

story, then I'll know better how to treat him. My prediction is that Dave's story will unfold like a Shakespearian tragedy. Anyway, it won't be very long, and we'll see."

"What do you mean by that, Ike? When are you going to do this amateur business?"

"We've decided that Dave shall come over to my place to-night, Stevie, and I'm going along in a few minutes to fix up a room for him."

"And what's happened to Marianne?"

"Do you mean the muddling mystic? That will be taken care of."

One thing at least about Ike's attitude toward Marianne was that he was absolutely sincere. He was not talking to make noise. Furthermore, Ike had an ability that Stevie did not have—he looked at the other sex abstractedly, and wasn't a squander-bug consumer of women like Stevie.

"Attention please. Attention please. The liberty run for to-night has been cancelled. Repeat. The liberty run for to-night has been cancelled. Over."

"That's not too good," Ike said. "I like to have the GIs get as much free time as possible. The liberty run into town at night helps."

Here again was an example of how the Tannoy churned the air with its noise—how it stirred the thinking of men and kept them roving with their thoughts.

Stevie got onto his feet. "I've got one errand to do, and it'll take about ten minutes. I'll be back

as soon as I get finished. You're going to hang around a while longer, aren't you, Claire ? ”

“ No, I don't think so, Stevie. I think I'll go back very soon.”

Stevie went over toward Claire and mumbled something about going into the other room and kissing in the dark. Claire, grinning, said. “ Sure, I'll kiss you in the dark, Stevie, but not just this minute. Anyway, where else would anyone kiss you ? After all, you're no Frankie Sinatra.”

Stevie sulked and eliminated himself from the room without further gesture. Ike turned to Claire. “ I don't know who's the doctor around here, and who's the patient. Looks to me, Claire, like you're going to have to take over Stevie, and I'd better get busy with Dave. Between the two of us, we can probably do a very good job.”

“ Ike, you actually look as worried as if you were going to have a baby.”

“ Well if I do,” Ike replied, “ That should win the prize for the week's neatest trick.”

Ike and Claire got up and left the hut to its metallic loneliness.

CHAPTER X

CLAIRE'S house had wide weathered doors that were easy to get in and out of. The wood jambs around the door had mellowed with the years and bent into the greyish-green rock that surrounded them. The rocked outer walls seemed to yawn over a large area. But, in fact, the house wasn't very large. It's funny how rock and masonry can mirage your conception of things.

The drive that approached that friendly looking entrance was only lightly gravelled. War-weeds shadowed the once neatly kept ditches. Between the weeds Ike's jeep tore over the loosened gravel and skidded to an abrupt stop in front of the old house.

Ike, with his patient-in-keep, sat arguing. Dave wanted to get back to the base, and Ike let him know that he was having his belongings moved to Claire's house. This was orders. Ike had been forecasting this scene for some time. In preparation he had brought formal orders which the C.O. had signed. Ike produced the orders for an arrogant boy who was thinking and talking spasmodically.

After some minutes Ike persuaded Dave that what he needed was only rest. It was not easy. Dave was asking lots of questions. Why was he here? Was he going to be court-martialled? Where was Marianne? What business was it of Ike's? Dave said there was nothing wrong with him. Then Ike asked what Dave meant when he said he wasn't

feeling funny. How did he feel? Why was he wandering in his walk? Why had he been vomiting, and why couldn't he eat? How much weight had he lost? What, really forty-eight pounds? How much did he weigh when he joined up? Just over two hundred ten? And now? Well, Dave admitted he wasn't quite feeling as fit as he ought. Ike proffered a drink, and what he said was an aspirin tablet. 'The so-called 'aspirin' was a rectangular crystal blue capsule. The capsule lay very still in Ike's hand as he passed a small leather flask to Dave—first Dave swallowed some of Ike's whiskey then, reaching out, Ike gave him that first capsule—the first round of what by force of circumstances began Ike's "shotgun" therapy.

Claire walked up and down in her sitting-room. As an old clucking clock on her mantelpiece struck out minutes she would walk to the window and stare at the men in the jeep. She was awaiting her cue. It seemed ages passed. In fact, it took Ike only about fifteen minutes before he and Dave dismounted from their jeep and strode up to the front door.

Claire opened the door. Across her threshold came strangeness in the shape of the gaunt, nerved figure of Dave. Ike, as he followed him, seemed to boost Dave into the house. The two dropped their hats onto the hall table. Then going into the sitting-room Dave literally seized a corner chair.

Dave's expression was meaningless and useless. His face sagged about the jawbone and his eyes seemed to evade each other in their unfriendliness.

His tie had been pulled violently askew, while the rest of his uniform billed an attitude of equal malpurposes.

Claire talked of the weather, of her garden, of the town gossip. But as she continued, her voice found trouble in forcing out disguised words that obviously were doing no good and accomplishing no end. Ike, sensing her inability to go on, took over. It was a heavenly sensation when she heard another voice. She almost could have cried, and would have, had not Ike begun to talk to Dave.

How was Dave feeling now? Better? Did she have a drink? Of course she had a drink. She could feel herself rushing to get that bottle that she had saved from last Christmas.

Dave spirited himself with the sight of her pouring the drinks; but before she had returned from the kitchen with the soda he was sitting with his face down in his hands. As Claire came into the room she reduced her speed, halting before she was half-way to the centre table. She turned and saw Ike was observing Dave with a soft reflection of satisfaction. She walked forward quietly and set the soda syphon onto the table. But she drew back quickly and sat down uprightly on the sofa. Ike didn't bother with words, but stood up strongly and marched over to the table. He poured a glass of plain soda-water for Dave—and two half-tumblerfuls of whiskey for Claire and himself. He shoved one whiskey at Claire and downed the other straight. Rousing Dave from his pensiveness, Ike put his hand forward with the

second capsule, followed by another hand, holding a glass of water.

Dave looked into Ike's hand. The blue capsule seemed to expand and contract. Ike's whole hand would turn a mysterious unnatural blue. Then the blue was washed away and the yellow of old tobacco stains showed. But the hand never wavered. For some minutes Ike just stood there motionless, wordless. Finally, without direction, Dave reached for the blue capsule.

The very taking of the second capsule seemed to encourage Dave to want to talk. Now he could have faith that the capsule would fix everything. Taking capsules was easier than praying or righting yourself by will power. The thought of "it will be done" was lifting him; and the action of the blue capsule was gilding him with imaginary success. Shapes in the far end of the room were cloud-hazed—blue clouds—pastel clouds that surrounded the chairs and tables and erased them painlessly. This was what was happening to his thoughts, too. They seemed to pass in review—in and around the room—but they didn't seem to bother him. Not like they always did. Every time they used to come around they nagged and picked at him. They used to recreate every indecent affair from apple-stealing to some other things he had crushed deep down amongst bad memories. But for so long he had to keep on crushing them down. They invariably kept bouncing back.

Dave began to smile wickedly. He wished openly to expose himself to more memories just for the hell

of it. It might be fun. He would like to lay them out on the floor and make them look foolish.

But then Marianne's image walked in. The top half of her was decorated with blue lace and four blue roses. But her bottom half was trousered with burlap and covered with dung stains and straw bits. He wanted to tear this ugliness away. He struggled to his feet to grab her before she vanished.

If someone had pailed spring water in his face he could not have sobered more quickly. Ike saw the face tightened and tapping Dave on the shoulder, they all moved upstairs to find Dave's room.

The bedroom Claire directed them into was high-ceilinged and looked down upon by a goodly number of age-slicked paintings of her ancestry. Ironically the family called it the Blue Bedroom. The large bed was propped up onto a platform and was burdened with too many blankets and a slippery silk-covered comforter. A couple of Indian throw rugs testified to the Marshall travel bug. A triumvirate of large windows would have lighted the room well had it not been for curtains that, keeping up with the best British tradition, required safe handling and inverted railroad tracks to hang from. The skinny chairs were fitted with rollers that made them pushable but noisy.

Dave's room did not smell of moth balls. In fact it nearly was odorless. A thin delicate scent that was hardly definable hung ghostlike in the air. Dave went to the window and raised it slightly. He evidently hoped that the odor would wish to escape

through the windows. But the odor was more an outward evidence of the attitude of the house itself, its personality, than any one of the physical senses.

Claire brought in towels and soap. She put them into the top drawer of the dresser and commended Dave to their uses. Without any joy-advertising or fun-promotion she left Dave and Ike and returned downstairs. As Claire went down the one armed staircase she was feeling more positive physically than she had for hours. Confidence often affects people that way. There is a certain muscular satisfaction in beginning to accomplish a purpose you are determined to achieve.

Back in the bedroom Dave was lying back with his head resting on half a mountain of pillows. The first successes of the drug in the sitting-room had passed away, and he was returned to anxiety of being visited by his old "friends," fear and trembling . . . There was one difference, however, and that was that he was having a recurrence of sleepiness. His inhibitions were not so pronounced and irritating. Now it was about time for Ike to strike and strike hard with the plan that he'd been examining and readying for use as his first weapon. He would attack with an assembly-line repair method—if one thing didn't work, he'd try another. And if that failed he'd try something else. But Dave was going to be put through cure after cure until he responded . . .

Ike had not told Claire, but Dave had been pretty rowdy earlier in the day. He threw an empty bottle

at somebody who started to argue with him, and apparently about nothing at all. The bottle gored the guy's arm. He also had been stepping over illusory hedges or hazards. Dave's pupils had dilated and he was, unfortunately, eating exactly nothing to replenish his food supply, being rapidly burned up by his hyper-sensitiveness.

There were two things above all that were absolute. In the first place, with the symptoms Dave had, he was not malingering. You couldn't exercise the pupils of your eyes. This thing was not in Dave's imagination, as some ignorant people claimed mental diseases were. To say it was in his imagination would be the rankest kind of heresy. The stimulus given by the mental state already had passed into a chemical reaction. Dave now was curable only by chemical treatment. But of course there had to be mental relief as well; or the stimulating fear would continue in constant rotation to reproduce that same chemical reaction over and over again.

One thing Ike felt he had established was that Dave did know he was trying to do something constructive for him. This would help. Without this feeling on the part of the patient it's often just too difficult to alter a man's outlook, even with drugs. There was another thing to the good. That was that Dave still had none of the signs of paralyzed arms or legs that often accompany this sort of case. He appeared okay with the exception of the eyes, and a slight fever. Perhaps if the treatment was

successful he could avoid that ordeal. It was ever so much harder to work with those cases.

As Ike was studying thoughts, Dave moved restlessly about the bed. It was difficult to talk from a sitting position in a chair, since the bed was so high. Ike decided to stand alongside the bed, and he took a position half-way between the head and foot and began to ask Dave more questions.

Ike's vocal ability perfectly suited his need for expressing kindness, confidence, and strength as questionmaster of his mind-repair shop. Those questions, though very personal, did not appear to shock Dave. And though abrupt in structure, they were spoken gently.

"Well Dave, here we are together again," Ike began. "I want you to get lots of sleep. Take it easy for a few days. These pills I have given you should help. I confess they weren't aspirin." Ike looked at Dave's eyes, and then continued :

"I don't know anybody in the ETO that I feel so close to as you, Dave. I don't really. I'm sorry about your troubles, you know that. In a way I really feel responsible." Ike then let his voice fade, and stood with his feet apart and easily erect, waiting for his sombre tones to echo through the halls of Dave's apprehension.

Before Dave could remember to answer, he had forgotten the answer, if there was an answer to be delivered. Ike was in the background, to wherever he was. He thought Ike was there. At least someone was there. Someone was saying something or

asking questions. Did they want him to answer? He did remember that someone said something nice. It had sounded nice. What was it? Oh, it didn't matter. Blue clouds seemed to be floating over the bed again. He could just see his own hands. They seemed the last outpost of a new world.

Far away Dave could hear a low-pitched thunder roll out, long and throbbing. It wasn't like most noise, for it didn't disturb him. It was quiet noise. Then he could remember the Tannoy back on the base. It seemed that the thunder was not nearly as loud as the Tannoy had been. But then the quiet thunder came nearer and something touched his face. Perhaps he was being crowded out of wherever he was supposed to be. He might be pushed into something he didn't want to do. He couldn't remember the first time he'd been pushed about. But he'd been pushed so many times.

Ike took his hand away from Dave's face. Had he given too large a dose? Would Dave still be able to talk while he was dropping off to sleep; or had the blue capsule worked too fast? Ike watched Dave's face lose its color. Dave moved his tongue in a subconscious effort to produce more saliva. This was Ike's chance to bring Dave around to talking out loud long enough to get something of his story out of him. He must find out what was rooted behind those dull brown eyes.

Ike spooned tap water from a glass into Dave's mouth. The water acted like something sacred, for Dave began to reopen his eyes and bring objects into

focus again. He saw Ike now for the first time in some minutes. He ran his water-moistened tongue over the dry enamel of his teeth. He daubed his lips with the wetness from his mouth. But his eyes would hardly stay open. The lids were heavy and sore as if he'd been up all night reading and straining over a small-typed edition of the Bible.

Dave's thinking absorbed all the time with self-dwelling. He thought about what he could and couldn't do. But it was all confined to very simple things—like wetting his lips; and looking for his hands; and listening to hear himself think. Then into his cloud-walled sanctum came the pounding of a powerful voice of authority that surely had to be dealt with. The voice grew louder and louder. It was punching rhythmical sounds at him. It was like the pounding of rough seas upon a sandy shore. The effect was musical, but hard and demanding.

Dave felt sure he was walking in the direction of the sounds. For quite some time he walked and walked. Then his eyes opened and he stared into a face. It was Ike's face. Ike was over him, looking down. But where were they? He was so tired from walking. Where had he been? How far had he walked? Had Ike been with him? Had he been on an island? Was he thinking he was an island? Who was it who said that "no man is an island?"

About Ike's head were palm trees that, caught in a wind, swayed to and fro, back and forth. His weary eyes tried to see beyond Ike and keep time

with the palms as they dipped and waved. Then he was not concerned with Ike any more. Ike was always there. Ike had always been near. Either this Ike, or that one. Doctors didn't have much personality. The good ones are all alike; and the bad ones you dismiss.

Then, as suddenly as they had appeared, the palm trees and their accompanying wind disappeared. Contorted forms of rain—slimed wet tree hulks bulged from behind Ike's features. Grey, tormented skies filled with the mechanical roaring of thousands of engines and just millions of wings that criss-crossed each other. Ike's face grew black and fierce. Dave looked at him and was about to plead; then he blinked and looked up again and saw a gaping mouth that would have swallowed him had it not crashed down over words instead.

"Why are you afraid to fly?" the voice asked. This could not be Ike. A strange person must have come in. He must not talk. He remembered all the instructions about loose talk. Never, never, never talk in public. Was he in public? He didn't know exactly. He knew a couple of dirty stories? Should he tell them? He guessed he'd better not say anything. He decided to listen, but it was terrible. First he could see the stranger, then he couldn't. It was all very confusing.

"Why are you afraid to fly? Why are you afraid to fly? Why are you afraid to fly?" The words fell out of the stranger's mouth one after the other. They didn't seem to stop. But as they continued he didn't

feel so strange. The more he heard that voice the more he became accustomed to it. It seemed a friendly voice. Then it became more and more friendly. It began again. "It's all right; tell me why you are afraid to fly."

Why shouldn't he tell? Dave almost told. "I have got to do my duty to the . . ." But he never finished his sentence. Marianne had at that instant walked back into the room. She had not changed her visionary robes. She still wore her blue lace blouse and her four blue roses. She still wore her burlap trousers with dung stains and straw bits. A chill ran over him. One thought penetrated his thinking right down to his inner sanity. Was this his wife-to-be? Was this his wife-to-be? He repeated himself many times.

"Come on, tell why are you afraid to fly?" the stranger asked. But by now Dave could be conscious only of outside noise—not attentive to it. Instead, imprinted on the inside of his forehead was a great electric sign flashing on and off; "Marry me," "Marry me," "Marry me." Marianne sentried the sign until Dave's mind cast loose from its mortal moorings and he could think no more.

As Ike watched Dave drift off to sleep he realized he'd failed to make much headway. He still didn't know what was secreted in Dave's mind that kept motivating him to his neurosis. And then, too, the weight losses were more than he had anticipated. That would mean he'd probably have to give insulin.

But on the constructive side there had been quite

a lot done, really. As predicted, Dave's bowels emptied out as his body was released from the tension and Ike had changed the linen sheet and rinsed off the rubber under sheet. He rubbed Dave lightly with alcohol before going back downstairs.

When Ike walked into the living room Claire was still sitting waiting for him. He had been upstairs for nearly four hours, and it was almost eight o'clock. Claire had fixed soup and sandwiches. The bottle of Christmas whiskey still stood on the table. If Ike had been a returning spouse, Claire could not have been more appropriately affectionate. She straightened up from the couch and, as Ike still brooded over the past few hours, she slipped her arms under his and around him. Ike, with no other feeling than naturalness, kissed her hair tenderly. For a minute they stood together silently, knowing the comfort they afforded each other. Stepping away Claire spoke.

"Ike, my sweet, how is our one-man family?" Claire knew the answer, but in her womanly compassion she wanted to encourage him to talk. It was her greatest compliment of respect.

Ike frowned and smiled in one emotion. The frown was the signal of a mere beginning with Dave, and the smile was the longing to live a blessed life with someone like her at home in a little house at the end of some country road. He knew many roads that, despite their ruts and wheel tracks, were lovely places to want to visit. They were the counterpart of Claire's spot in England. But Ike remembered

his wife. He felt Claire was substituting, but there was the feeling of being charmed by her without any transfer of her soul to him. When Ike was a boy his father had said, "always tell a girl, 'Let's be friends first.'" But now he was homesick more than ever for home, and he wanted to be "just friends."

"Dave should sleep for a couple of days. I'll try again to make him talk." Ike was moving about confidently—hoping the sound of his words would convey his meanings. Then he continued. "In addition I'm sending you extra rations. There should be an orderly over here in a few minutes who will see that Dave's bedclothes are changed every so often and that he isn't too much of a bother. The orderly may have to give insulin later on. That was the main reason I had him follow us with Dave's kit.

"So far, I haven't been able to get very far. Dave started to mumble once, but then stopped just as he seemed to want to say something. Anyway, Claire, we shall have to be very patient."

The two sat and munched food and drink for an unmeasurable time. The orderly arrived and went upstairs. Ike settled into a chair. Claire moved the leavings of their supper into the kitchen. In a few minutes she returned to find Ike in the hall getting ready to leave. He handed her a paper with 'phone numbers and his itinerary for the next twelve hours. He had to get back to the base. If Dave got restless, she was to 'phone.

Ike went out to his jeep and pulled away from the

house. Halfway down the drive he braked the jeep and his sensitive hands dropped away from the steering wheel. This time, thank God, he was going to have a case that he could handle in his *own* way. No snooping inspectors would find Dave here and mess up his treatment. He was operating under almost ideal circumstances. It was not like men being killed far away where he couldn't do anything, or having them shot down over Germany. This time he *could* help. Blood filled his hands and he drove off.

CHAPTER XII

RECEDING rattles of Ike's jeep going back over the road to the base left the house in silence. Claire removed the dirty plates and glasses and returning into the sitting room, paused. She listened for sounds from Dave's room and then to make quite certain that he was alright she tip-toed upstairs and peeped into his room. Dave was asleep. She closed the door and went downstairs.

The fire in the grate was down to a handful of red embers but the room was still cozy and warm. Claire felt terribly feminine in these surroundings and with a book, graced the settee. But soon her eyes rose from the pages of the open book and stared into the dying fire. Weighing how much her life had changed in the near past, she remembered how monotonous and lonely the blacked out nights had been before the boys from the base had arrived. Lurking fears filled every corner of this house for hours that seemed to last thru eternity while she waited, praying for the return of brothers whose days were numerically numbered by fate. Two brothers in the Air Force. Now there was only one left. There were two in family now resident on this earth, her elder brother and herself. But in the strangeness of her own feelings she found ready gratitude to God that she was being lifted from her depressing anguish by her sense of duty to the boys. She didn't hesitate to do anything, everything.

In a bold sweeping gesture of circling thinking Claire's thoughts came to Ike and Stevie. Her admiration for Ike was deep, solid and sure. His quiet authority had an amiable, sheltering effect on her. But Stevie was enthusiasm itself. For her he spelled gaiety, fun and a vigorous life worth while expending oneself on. She never probed her heart for definitions of feelings before, but now cornered between the emotions of two men, definitions came freely. The differences were obvious.

Stevie was a man of his own mind and will fancies. If he wanted a decision he would force it or call out "get going." But Ike was never forceful except perhaps in his own thinking. Ike was introspect. You had to guess-out his mind.

It was Stevie who made her laugh, forget, and want to feel human emotions. Stevie made her reveal herself as a woman. He made her want to fix her hair and daub perfume on her body. With him she could sparkle. Claire, feeling the burden of her responsibilities maybe just too much, had matured quickly and been kept steadily at chores robbing her of the pleasures of youth. With Stevie she felt a kind of joyous relief. He, naturally waved obstacles aside and they seemed always to obediently disappear into nowhere. As if she would be everlastingly satisfied in his arms, her face radiated light and warmth.

Claire couldn't help but to be fond of Ike and she felt his yearning and necessity for her friendship. But where Claire was Ike's necessity so Stevie was

Claire's necessity. She could always open that door and escape into his carefree nature. Between them any decision erupted masses of uncorrelated thoughts, mostly good about them both for they were her heroes except her family of course but they were different.

Disturbing noise scattered her dreams. Someone was approaching the house and their crushy footsteps on the gravel entrance gave them away. There was a frantic rapping on the door and Claire quickly threw the latch back and swung the old crickety door open.

"Where can I slide this bicycle" and glancing at Claire's quizzical face Marianne went right on, "I've got to talk to you. Sorry, you don't seem very pleased about my visit but that cannot be helped."

Marianne didn't wait to be told where to park her bike but pushed it alongside the house. She was arrogantly brisk. Claire measured out enough words to feel her way in what promised to be a difficult sparring match.

"Why of course I'm pleased to see you Marianne. You've been here before. It's only a little late and I didn't expect visitors. Do come in."

Marianne shot thru the door. Claire followed talking to boost her own courage more than to be over-social but her tone was light and friendly.

"I see you came on your bicycle. It couldn't have been much fun to-night."

"Yes," Marianne commented in return, pulling off her rain hood and coat. "They wouldn't let me have a jeep. That's those super conceited men for

you ! Everybody is more important than me I'm told."

" Come in here into our sitting room and warm yourself. Now how about a drink—tea or alcohol ? I can offer rum if you'd like that ? " They went into the sitting room and Claire shut the door behind them.

" Do make yourself comfortable near the fire. I'm afraid I've just about run out of wood except for this chunk," and stooping Claire picked up a small log from the woodbox and tossed it on the few embers. Then continuing, " Generally I never light the fire until later to save fuel."

" Yes, I know but I understand you had your fire earlier to-night. You have visitors or at least one, don't you Claire ? " Marianne challenged her square on, face to face. Marianne's complexion was reddened by the elements. Failing to draw a quick comeback she jerked out her cigarettes and lit up. She'd try another angle.

" If that rum offer still goes I'll take it. That is if you can spare it," she added in haste.

" But of course." Claire walked to the sidetable and fixed the rum never for a second letting Marianne out of her sight. In her state of mind she was probably up to filthy tricks.

" Pour it down ! " Claire handed Marianne the rum and put herself opposite her.

" What about you Claire, aren't you drinking with me ? "

Claire only shook her head and forced a smile.

"Always composed. Always the perfect lady. You know what you need Claire?" Marianne gulped her drink and sharply changed the conversation from Claire to her major business. She sat back in her chair and poised herself.

"Listen," she commanded, "I'll come straight to the point. You're not so dumb as you try to make the boys believe. You know quite well what brings me here at this hour. God knows I don't relish coming over here. Now give sister, where is he? Don't you try to stall. It's no use. I've come for Dave and I'm going to see him. Is that clear?"

"I don't understand your offensive tone Marianne. I'm the last person to prevent your seeing Dave. He's not my property. I have no rights. What is between You and Dave is your own personal affair. But he is in my house and he has retired. You should choose a more appropriate hour for social visits."

"Don't try to get proper at this stage. Be reasonable. I'm upset. Can you wonder. You saw me last night. Well Dave and I argued. Naturally I thought he'd come around afterwards but he hasn't showed up. Nothing happened. Then I hear second-hand from some of the boys that the flight surgeon—that evil man—that low bastard—who I hate like poison, dragged him off the base and has stuck him in hiding. I knew he'd be here. Everybody knows about your flirtation with Ike, my dear. How could I miss. It was just too easy. Anyway I risked it and now I know. For God's sake Claire, you must

help me. I'm the only person who has a right to look after him. After all he is going to marry me."

"Marianne, let's be sensible," Claire paused slightly. She had thus far held her temper. She was mad at first about the Ike gossip but inside it had a nice, flattering effect. That wasn't so important anyway. "What you say Marianne may be so but you wouldn't want me to endanger your future husband's health by disregarding the doctor's orders."

"What doctor—you mean that small town hick? Listen kid, there's nothing wrong with Dave that a few hours alone with me couldn't fix. Ike only wants to separate Dave and me." Marianne got onto her feet and cage-walked the room, pacing up and down.

"That heel has been intriguing against me for God only knows how long. His orders, eh? Pooh on his damn orders. Claire, I've got to see Dave. Blast this being nice. If you don't do something about it I'll yell my head off and he'll hear and come running from wherever he is."

Claire wasn't surprised. She had a feeling they both knew this was Marianne's last chance. She was fighting fate to hold her man and he was fast slipping away from her. Marianne must be feeling this too. What a horrible thought, Claire meditated. Suppose she were in Marianne's shoes. Woman's intuition was the only common link between them. They knew the other knew.

Claire rose and took Marianne gently by her shoulders. "Please, Marianne, please relax. Please

wait. Dave will be better soon. Believe me. He's very ill. He collapsed from complete nervous exhaustion. You know, he's been under continuous mental strain for many months now. He's just plain worn out. Let him rest. If you care a tuppence for him you wouldn't insist on discussions. He——."

"Blah, blah, blah." Marianne cut her short. "Don't give me that sugar stuff, sweet pea. It might be a convincing line in Sunday school but not here. Who the hell are you to behave like Mother Superior? What do I know will happen in days, in weeks. I want to have some things settled here and now. Believe me I'm losing my patience, I mean it now."

"I guessed that much. Now it's my turn to do the talking and you are going to listen. It won't be pleasant either. You sit yourself and be quick about it."

Marianne was stopped cold by Claire's harsh, batted words. Was this Claire? Absurd! She was unquestionably showing off. Marianne flew on in rage.

"I'm not going to listen to anything. I won't have any disappointed dame poke her daggers into me. I'm going to see Dave this very minute." Marianne moved towards the door. Claire who was nearest to the hall door stepped over and pretended to lock it and withdrew the key.

"You'll do nothing of the sort. Until you come to your senses you'll stay here a bit. I've lots of time. My brother is just outside. He'll be coming

into the house in a few minutes. Perhaps he can help!" Claire's bluffing was striking home.

"You bitch," Marianne angered and then burst forth again, "I slowly begin to get it. You are in this conspiracy, this plot against me too. Are you, well, we will see."

Marianne took a quick breath to yell but before she could open her mouth Claire had grabbed her and was shaking every gram of wind from her.

"You little fool. You better play or else. Don't you realize I know more than you think I do. I know you lived with Bryan. I know you tried this same pregnancy gag on him but it didn't work. You've had your fun with some others too. Plenty. I know and so does Ike. I suggest you get out of here and do as I say do, but quick."

Marianne reacted as if she had been hit right across her face. She gaped at Claire with her mouth sagging open. Then after some time she drew up her hands and flung herself into a chair. Hitting with her fists against the overstuffing, she cried and screamed calling out from convulsions of spiteful emotion.

"That cad—I could kill him. I hate you—all of you—you've been trying to trap me—I never want to see any of you again—let me out of here." With her bitterness partially spent in her tantrum, she spoke those sour sarcastic words "So what. Yes, all lies all right. I'm not pregnant. I've never been pregnant. Matter of fact, I can't get that way. So

what. Open that door. Let me out, I'm suffocating in here."

"The door is open," Claire said quietly.

"You'll get licked at this game of yours one of these days and don't forget that one my dear friend." Marianne rushed into the hall. Scooping up her coat and hood, she faced Claire again and finalized.

"Some men are useful but never essential."

She twisted her body out of the large oak door and slammed it. Claire trembled. Her throat had dried from fear. She listened for sounds from Dave's room. There was nothing. Prudently she walked toward the kitchen to find drinking water.

CHAPTER XIII

Two nights passed. Dave slept. As he lingered between Heaven and eternity, he wore a hundred different faces. Not far from Dave's secluded inverted heaven, into which he had gone by the mind chemist's prescription, the life on his Liberator base continued unchanged, unaffected. Hardly anyone missed the co-pilot. But then there are so many co-pilots, so many people. Men and machines at war are a law unto themselves ; and forgetting for them is an easy ritual, a practised ritual.

Just after the third midnight Dave called out from his sleep. His barkings were indistinguishable. The orderly went to Claire's room and woke her. She rushed downstairs to 'phone Ike to hurry over. It seemed more like months than days since Ike had made a Rip Van Winkle out of Dave.

Returning to the blue room, the orderly caught Dave as he was about to roll out of bed. Dave was turning, twisting, restless. The orderly took a lengthy yellow strap from the bedroll on which he had been sleeping, and, slipping it around Dave's chest, secured both ends to the bed frame.

Ike's jeep roared up the drive. He went straight upstairs. He spaded off his hat and coat. Then, shaking himself slightly as if to remove the trace of the night's blackness through which he had come, he walked to the bedside of his capsule kid. The kid was sleep-fighting as he struggled back to conscious-

ness. Ike turned off a centre light that shone too brightly onto Dave's face. He left only a small bedlamp burning. As Dave rolled first to one side and then to the other, Ike and the orderly removed the clammy bedclothes and sheets. Ike then sent the orderly and Claire to prepare food, thus giving him an opportunity to observe his patient undisturbed.

Dave's fever had lost itself in his body as he slept. It had been a queer, half-real fever that sweated pores but passed away in dreams. Visually it appeared Dave was emerging from a common nightmare—the kind you get as punishment for gorging yourself unmercifully with cheese and cold garlic sausages, just before jumping into bed.

But Dave had no common nightmare. It was no stimulus of food that made this boy, who at least on the surface came to war with an unconquerable spirit, back away from the airplane and the peril it entailed.

When Dave first joined, the boys had said he was "difficult to know." But other than that he was a boy who made little trouble for anyone, and mixed easily.

Ike took one of Dave's hands and massaged it. He removed the bedroll strap completely and rubbed Dave's arms and chest with alcohol. As Ike massaged him Dave's eyes opened periodically, revealing glazed whiteness through half-closed lids. Then the whiteness dropped down and away. The eyes, still only half uncovered, were sightless. Fingers of a restless

hand found a sucking mouth. Dave's tongue could feel his fingers as he began to contract for consciousness.

Ike kneaded Dave's flesh more briskly in an effort to pull him toward his senses. As he systematically worked, Dave evidenced the effect of the massaging. His eyes widened and circled, trying desperately to fix on something to see. But Dave was more peaceful than he had been for some time. He wanted someone to exercise for him, to move for him. His vision brushed lightly about the room. His mouth stretched toward its corners. Ike spoke, quietly commanding Dave's attention.

"You've certainly had a fine rest, young fellow. I've been waiting for you to wake up. It would be a good idea if you ate something. How would you like some breast of real Virginia chicken, Dave?"

Dave tried to answer but felt too lazy. His bones and skin seemed suspended, floating in soft, kind soap bubbles. However, he was terribly hungry. He would have enjoyed eating out of a trough even. Ike didn't hesitate long, but questioned again,

"How's about some white chicken, Dave?"

This time Dave appealed to his mind to help him solve his problem of saying "yes." He produced an affirmative nod.

The food gave Dave strength. He ate chicken. He drank milk. He ate vegetables. The next morning he ate more. He had ham, eggs, potatoes, tomato juice, toast. But everything seemed to disappear leaving him as hungry as ever. Days before

Dave could remember, he had not wanted to eat at all. He hadn't been able to digest his food. He hadn't been hungry for some time. This eating was a victory. He always had loved to eat.

Claire wondered why Dave had eaten so much, and why Ike had dismissed Dave without more serious questioning. But Ike had wanted Dave to eat, to eat as much as he possibly could. He said Dave could have up to sixteen or eighteen pounds of food a day.

It was not until evening that Doctor Ike returned, ready to talk with Dave again.

During the day Dave had dozed off to sleep several times. He was quieter, with, of course, the exception of normal bed fatigue. After his evening meal, Ike came to Dave's bedside once more. He stood halfway between the head and foot and asked those necessary preliminary questions. Had Dave had enough food? Was he feeling better? Was there anything he wanted? Was Claire treating him all right? Did he like the bedroom? Was the bed comfortable? Was there enough air?

All the questions were answerable by one word. Each time that word was the same. Dave found himself pronouncing it more clearly each successive time. He was finding that "yes" came onto his lips almost automatically whatever Doctor Ike asked him. The fact that Ike's questions required only "yes" answers didn't seem strange at all.

Ike was introducing a system to his questioning. He now started 'way back, probing into Dave's

memory to work out the thread of mental progression, year by year, event by event.

"Where were you born, Dave?" Ike asked.

For some minutes Dave couldn't think where he had been born. Ike repeated the question several times. Then it occurred to Dave that he had been born in North Carolina. That was where his mother had come from. Now he remembered. Yes, she had come from Raleigh, North Carolina. When Dave was a boy of only a few years they lived there and later she used to take him there on vacations. They went to visit his mother's family. He could remember he had been dumped on the grandparents a number of times when his family went off to see friends.

"I was born in Raleigh, North Carolina," Dave answered.

"What was the first thing you remember about Raleigh, Dave?"

Dave frowned slightly. He thought about Raleigh. He remembered how his parents used to fight with each other. About the first thing he could remember was their terrible shouting. The shouting would start after his mother had been out at one of her frequent parties.

The frequent parties had been with men Dave had never seen before, and usually didn't see again. He remembered there was one time his mother came home very late. There was a violent scene and he awoke and ran downstairs. He had come into the room as his father and mother were quarrelling. She had cuffed his face. Her diamond ring slashed his cheek.

He flew outdoors and down the street. His face bled furiously. His father raced after him, and caught him. He took Dave across his knees and beat him for running away. His father said he should learn to face anything—he was a man now, not a coward. But Dave still wore very short pants.

After this experience his family moved from Raleigh. Shortly afterward his mother had not been feeling very well, and had gone to a hospital. She returned with a baby brother she had said was for him to play with. Dave found out soon enough that you couldn't play with baby brothers.

For seven years he had been the sole object of what attention and affection his family afforded. After a few months he became terribly jealous of that baby brother. One day he ripped the covers from the baby's cot and picked the brother up into his arms. He was about to throw the baby out of the second story window of their house when his mother arrived in time to grab the brother away from him.

That was a long, long time ago. But each minute detail, each step, each reflection, of the horror of that incident tracked him through life as a bloodhound might. When other thoughts didn't occupy Dave's mind, and he was off his guard, he re-lived that incident as vividly as if it had just happened. He tried to salve his own conscience by giving, and by excessive attentiveness to his brother.

Then his father and mother had separated. His brother and he went with his father to live in New York. From that time on New York became the

center of a great mixing bowl for Dave's life. From New York everything happened in rapid sequence. But not everything happened right in New York, except that everything that happened seemed to start from there.

He liked his father. It probably was more a respect for parental authority and material ties that built up this feeling. The wrong, worrying things happened when he was away from that authority. That authority however was most depressing to him. He always escaped the pressure of that authority when he could.

Some of those worrying things happened when he was at his mother's. In fact, a great deal more happened at his mother's when he was in New York. She drank constantly. She was terribly unhappy. She said his father was driving her insane. He, "the little Dave," should make his father do something. She blamed him for not doing anything. She held him responsible. But what could he do?

She wouldn't let Dave go out to play with other boys. He had to listen to how everyone hated her. Sometimes he cried. He wasn't quite ten years old.

She always brought up that awful incident when he tried to kill his brother. She said he tried to murder him. He hated that word, "murder." She knew this always made Dave tremble with fear. She made a sympathy mart of him. When she got him into the right mood, she could tell her unhappy story with all the flourishes.

He had to listen because she had something on him. He had to listen. She would tell on him. She could ruin him. She would, too. He had to listen. She routined her attack. She never stopped—until he broke down and was screaming—shouting—yelling ; and she screamed and shouted, and then he always fell from exhaustion.

He remembered dozens of incidents about his early life. His brother never would go to their mother's. The brother had pushed that duty off onto Dave. He had accepted this duty to expiate the past. Anyway, the mother didn't seem to care for him as she cared for Dave, or said she cared.

Most of the good things that happened were away from either his father or mother. There was a summer camp he used to go to where he met boys he liked. Those were good times. He was allowed to do practically anything he wanted to do. He went horseback riding. He swam in a great blue lake that mountains grew out of. He played tennis, and he learned a lot of nice, expensive habits.

Ike gave Dave water to drink, and handed him a blue capsule. Dave studied the capsule for a brief moment. Then he picked the capsule up and swallowed it, as if he were accepting the presence of an old friend.

Dave hardly realised he was speaking his thoughts aloud as Ike stood tirelessly deciphering the half-pronounced words. Ike didn't distract Dave in asking him to repeat, or to speak more clearly. That might be disastrous.

At first the story was jumbled. Then Dave began to weave a clearer skein of thought. He discontinued editorialising and was talking of boarding school—away from home.

Those three words, “away from home,” were a by-line to his experience. That is, if you could call being away from home going away from his father’s house in New York, for other than the New York house of ancient brown painted stone, Dave had no home.

The house was a place Dave checked in and out of, always *en route* somewhere else. He went there either to get money, or to change his clothes, or to pick up fresh orders. He thought of those orders as the price he paid for money received, for bed, for board.

He went to college away from home. He spent summers in the country away from home. He got engaged to several girls away from home; but he always came back for that same treatment—the shouting and the orders by a forceful man in a dark suit, whom he told himself he “respected” as the head of the family—or from a demented mother.

“What made you join the Air Forces after you got out of college, Dave?” Ike persisted. He was trying to establish a motive as to why Dave had begun the series of events that so recently had led him to his present unhappy mental situation.

Dave thought. Then moving his lips slowly and mechanically, he said: “One time Mother sent for me to come to see her. I was made to go because

my brother had gone away and joined the Army. She was the same as always. She attached herself to me. She told me how she loved me as a baby. How she suffered to bring me into the world. How she gave up all the pleasures of life to take care of me. Now I burdened her because I was a stubborn baby. How much I cost her. Then she held up *that* incident in front of me. She said 'if it hadn't been for me you would have killed your brother; you would have murdered him.' She recriminated me. She bludgeoned me. I was stronger than usual. I tried to keep soberly away from emotion.

"She knew she had failed. But she went on. She pestered me. After a while she called in her lover. The lover was a woman who displayed effectively an impersonal masculinity, licensed by the wearing of skirts, and hair cut short. The lover's art was evidently confined to the friction of a depraved body against Mother's wanting passions, that her insanity had weaned of their loveliness.

"There wasn't much art for art's sake! The professional was tired of trade with an outdated lover. Mother was not a very profitable customer. I felt more than just grief. I felt as she wanted me to. I felt responsible. I guess I felt responsible the way children often feel for their parents. It was so difficult. Even Mother's woman lover was not attentive enough. She said Mother had no husband who could offer her kind a sufficiently balanced sex-diet.

"I tried to help. I tried to find mother a decent

man instead of her freak lover. I tried to understand. Everything depended on me. She said it did. I always had to help with things I didn't want to mess with. Besides, I was losing my friends. When I 'phoned them the receiver was snapped down when they identified my voice. I was terribly unhappy; both for Mother and for myself.

"I went back to New York. Mother followed me. It was 1940. I went to our house. I lied to Father. I really didn't want him to fuss at Mother, or hurt her any more, or she to hurt him. I simply didn't want any trouble.

"She followed me through the streets. She went after me into trains. All the time, she followed—she followed—followed.

"She wanted to come to Father's house. She made me promise that I would force Father to take her back. I lied. I didn't tell him. I couldn't bear a scene. A scene couldn't have helped.

"I gave her money. All I had. She said she was hungry. But she bought silly, useless things. She hung on to me, hung on and on. I took her to places where Father and my friends wouldn't see me.

"No one would have anything to do with me. Every time anyone sat near us, Mother would bite and scratch unknown people with her bitter remarks. She was sloppy, and nastied herself with thoughtlessness.

"My friends avoided me. They hated me. They hated me. Do you hear? They hated me, hated me! I had to borrow money. A lot of money. I

couldn't scrape up even enough money to go on feeding sufficient liquor to Mother ; or enough for myself to be able to stand her. I owed so much money. So much money. Everyone hated me. I knew they hated me.

" One time I passed an Army Air Forces recruiting poster. It said there was opportunity in the Air Forces for men for overseas training. I was immediately jealous. So this was what my brother was doing. He was taking it easy, was he ? I fumed with anger. My brother had things soft. I was determined to join the Air Forces. So I had been left behind to fight the battle for a disgraced family, had I ? Well they'd soon see. I rebelled. I went straight to the Post Office to join up. As I went into the Post Office and walked up to the desk marked with a sign ' Recruiting,' she grabbed me.

" She cried and acted. Everyone there saw. She said I was forsaking her. She screamed right in front of a crowd. She wept. She pleaded. She had no shame. She said she saved me from killing my brother. She told the people who had gathered about to watch us perform. I wished I could have killed her—or that I had killed my brother.

" I gave in. I had to. I could stand it no longer.

" I got so drunk that I could only see her through a mist of liquor madness. I made friends with liquor very quickly, and without further hesitation.

" After eight months of drinking, drinking, I was so tired of hearing that I tried to kill my brother. Then one day I strengthened—I turned on her.

"I was seemingly out of breath all at once. I jumped at her and tore at her like a wild animal. I could feel my hands about her throat. For the first time in months I was almost happy. I drew back, but only for an instant. I went forward again and threw her to the floor. Her face was tight and snarled—she jumped up and flung herself at me.

"I struck her with my open hand. I struck her. Not just once, but time after time. Harder and harder I struck her. And she struck back, laughing and working her arms. I liked to be hit, and I liked to hit back. I saw myself satisfying a weird desire. I didn't know what desire, nor care. Then everything became still again.

"Someone separated us. I was very tired. That was the last time I saw my Mother. I joined the Air Forces. Now I hear from her nearly every day. She writes. She follows me by mail for money—for money—for an allotment."

Dave's last words trailed off into nothingness. Was he beginning to think of something else? Ike was so stunned by what he had just heard that he could hardly think. The depth of the hurt to this boy's heart had been far greater than he had imagined. That story, uncloaked, sent forth a challenge. Ike feared delving further without assurance from someone, even God, that being a doctor gave sufficient permission for his probing. As Ike stood trying to feel for his courage to go on, Dave talked again.

"Honest, I didn't want to join the Air Forces. I

didn't like the Army. I thought it was a place where Mother couldn't follow. That's all honest."

Dave's mind competed with his words. A guilt-type complex was airing itself. Perhaps this was sufficient provocation for the neurosis. Ike was encouraged.

"I can't help it," Dave kept on raving. "I don't really hate anybody. Not even Mother—or anybody—or the Germans—or anybody. I've never been to Germany. I can't tell Germans from anybody else. I don't believe I know any Germans. I don't know any Japanese. I don't hate anyone. I don't even remember who taught me to hate."

"Ever since I struck her I've been tortured. I hate her—but it was all wrong. I know that. But she started me and I couldn't stop. Really I couldn't. I hate myself for striking her. I hate myself for touching her. She is my mother. I did it and I hate myself."

Then Dave subsided vocally as he attempted to determine how hate crept into his life. He started to speak again, beginning at those first thoughts. He repeated his whole story to Ike, all over again. There was Raleigh, the screaming, his attempt to kill his brother, boarding school, college, New York, Father, Mother, the Post Office, the fight in the apartment, and finally the Army Air Forces. There were the trips to Germany, but they didn't even seem worth talking about. They really hadn't bothered him very much.

CHAPTER XIV

IKE pieced a confused life together. It made an illogical pattern. He wondered, now that he had Dave's story, what he was going to do with it. He took Dave's pulse and found it too rapid. His fever had increased.

Ike meditated. There were two problems: first was this the whole story of Dave; and secondly, how was he going to prove that Dave was not right in being so upset? It was the worst Ike ever had heard. He wondered how long he could have stuck it if he'd been in Dave's position.

Dave's voice had lost the throbbing of its low notes, and was whining out of tune. He was throwing off more of those burdensome thoughts. He spoke aloud, "I've hoped he'd get it. It will serve him right. I killed him last week. Do you hear me? I killed him last week."

Anyone who got killed in the group, Dave substituted for his brother. He would substitute the brother for some unfortunate individual who got shot down. This substitution method of thinking allowed Dave to fulfil the impulse of his long-past childhood. He'd thrown the brother out of that window numerous times lately. The effects were cursing his footsteps. Ike now knew of this hate, and he imagined-in the details.

Ike watched Dave fade from twilight into the darkness of sleep. He turned from the bed and for

the first time saw that Claire was standing there close to him watching, and listening.

She was fascinated by Dave's story. She absorbed his life, word by word. Now she wanted to do something more than ever. Just offering her house as a lodging place was not enough. Mentally she kept offering herself to Dave. She would lie with him—anything. It was about the only thing she hadn't done that she could do. It means sacrifice, and she felt a dramatic sacrifice was called for. The Bible always prescribed flesh by sacrifices. Maybe not this kind, but certainly this *would* do. She was not biological about it. She just wanted to do something. She probably wouldn't enjoy it, but it would give her a sense of contributing to the war effort in a material way. She wasn't vulgar. That aspect never occurred to her. It was simply something she could do !

Ike motioned Claire out of the room.

In the sitting room Ike explained to Claire. She should not have been in the bedroom ; whatever she heard she was not to repeat. This was a security matter. There were certain things in war that were the individual soldier, sailor or airman's security, even if that privilege was violated in some higher places. Claire understood, but in a way it made her sad. She wanted to help, and she had been scolded by Ike. She managed only with some difficulty to stem her tears, and smile.

On the fifth evening Ike arrived at the old stone house as usual. Anxious to get into the final stages

of his talks with Dave, he soon went upstairs. Over the house Liberators were circling, returning from a mission to Germany. Inside everything was quiet, and Dave, still partially stupefied by the drug, lay still. As usual Ike asked questions that required "yes" answers. Over an hour passed before that gentle conversation induced Dave back into a state that again enabled Ike to look into his past.

Now Ike had determined to fit the local happenings around the base into the picture. He must connect the demented mother, the attempted killing of Dave's brother, with the present. How did Marianne fit it? What was her influence? What actually precipitated his refusal to fly and the accompanying hallucinations?

Ike refreshed Dave's memory of their many talks. Again he gave Dave a blue capsule. Again Dave took the capsule with that ever-increasing feeling of fraternity for its very blueness, and its comforting facility.

As the blue capsule began to take effect, Dave entered again the twilight that precedes drug-sleep.

Ike began to question him about the days in his training section—about the first time he met Pappy Adams' crew. Those were pleasant days for Dave, and they were easily recalled and retold. Aboard Pappy's Liberator no one followed him. No one made him do anything they wouldn't do themselves. Moreover, he was making money now for the first time. The pay check was his own. There was a certain feeling of power and confidence in endorsing your pay check; and the officialness of the check made

him feel responsible for things. That's how he'd been so encouraged to work. From the motivation of feeling respectable again, Dave won his advancement. Then, too, the food was regular and good. The exercise was scheduled. The training-base life was so active that his mind was wrenched from its former occupational worry and kept busy constructing a second man, a second Dave.

Really it wasn't a second Dave, for this same Dave, that he knew himself to be, was the Dave of the summer camps—the Dave who had made a mark among boys of his own age. Perhaps the second Dave, in the definition of his thoughts of himself, was really the first. In other words, the real *he* was buried, and he was only *now* finding himself.

And so there was event after event. Dave got his commission because he earned it. It had been very hard work, and he was very proud of that single gold bar.

During training he moved about often, and few knew where he was. This was a blessing. He had been so busy that he had not written to his family except on rare occasions. Partly out of devilment and partly out of self-protection, Dave never gave addresses. He outwardly cut the ties of the brown-stone house and a mother somewhere, "care General Delivery." The days passed in rapid succession, in easy succession. Dave had found new friends who did like him. They certainly didn't hate him. He had put faith in these friends. They responded. They didn't seem to be the same sort of people he'd

known at home. They seemed to be different people. For one thing, the money motive wasn't very strong around the Air Forces. There was plenty of money. There were some men who bucked their way to promotion. For the most part the Army seemed to be a place more like a country club. Of course, everyone wanted to get the war over with ; but there was a certain possibility for social atmosphere in the Army that most commanding officers did not pass by unheeded.

To the country club atmosphere was added the GI. This genuine humor even worked on some GI who did not conform to that American soldiers' recipe of humor, corn-starch and esprit de corps.

When Dave came to England, a new chapter of his life opened. His Father found out where he was. His Mother found out where he was. Someone gave them his A.P.O. number. He understood they wrote the War Department Bureau of Personnel, who kindly assisted them to locate their son. Dave was not exactly ungrateful, but the combination of flying to Germany, of a new country, and of having to face the written word, the memory of his mother and his father, was tougher than any air battle over Naziland.

This part, Ike understood so well. It was obvious that the series of events had worked an undue hardship in the boy's mind.

Then a peculiar thing happened. Ike asked a question—and Dave thought he heard a voice calling out. He didn't know whose voice it was, and he couldn't tell whether it was Ike's voice or not.

Someone was calling Marianne. She answered in a hard, mannish voice, and her vision came into the bedroom and climbed onto his bed. She sat on the footboard facing him. She wore her blue lace blouse, her four blue roses, and her burlap trousers covered with dung stains and straw bits. She was mocking him.

Dave remembered the first time he had seen Marianne. She was assigned to their air base in England. She had seen him tear a letter up before he had bothered to open it. She asked what was wrong. Was he homesick? But he had said that she did not understand. She said she wanted to understand. Then days and weeks passed, and he told her almost *everything*.

One week-end they had obtained permission and gone off to South England. They took rooms over a small country pub. They stayed together. It was peculiar, but Dave was not terribly thrilled by it all. Marianne had made quite a thing of it. She insisted that they get married. She wanted him to get assigned to ground work. She said it wasn't fair to her for him to fly.

Ike, listening, could have rejoiced at the introduction of Marianne. This was the first clue connecting Dave's past and present. Of course, everyone around that base knew about Dave and Marianne. But now there would be something concrete, some real evidence of whether or not Marianne was responsible for Dave's refusing to fly.

Dave was still thinking about Marianne. He was

remembering. He was remembering a morning not very many days before. He was trying to reconstruct what she had said, and then suddenly he saw her once more sitting at the end of his bed. She threatened to tell about his trying to murder his brother. She threatened him. She threatened to tell everything ! He closed his eyes, but he could not avoid her.

He saw her coming across the airfield *that* morning. He had been to the briefing and was on his way to their Liberator. They stopped the truck. He got out and went to her. She demanded that he not fly. She had heard the mission was to Happy Valley. He told her it was none of her business.

Dave liked flying. He liked the crew he flew with. He liked Pappy. He liked Fritz, the bombardier ; yes, in fact he liked all the guys : Bicarb, Cohen and the rest. And then she told him. It was at that minute when she told him—told him that she was pregnant. And she shouted at him. She shouted that it was his fault. He was responsible. She would tell on him. She could ruin him. She would, too. He had to listen.

What in God's name was this ? Was this Marianne, or was it his mother ? Who was Marianne's lover ? And then, as usual, Dave broke down. He fell from exhaustion. He refused to fly. But now he was arrogant, and he screamed into the space in front of him. " Get her off my bed ! Get her off my bed ! Take Marianne away."

Looking at the end of the bed, Dave saw many

faces, and other people coming, walking across his bed, Marianne was hidden from view.

Ike was talking now. From his pocket the flight surgeon drew a white knockout pill. There would be no more talking. In a few minutes Dave passed out of consciousness.

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In Nissen Hut B.O.Q. dash 201 Wa-Wa stoked the stove. Stevie was listening to Ike's account of Dave's treatment. It appeared to have been a wise decision to take Dave to Claire's house. This kind of case normally would have gone to London, or some other place. Had that happened, not only would Ike's pride have been hurt, but probably his perception of many other problems on the base would not have been so sharpened, and his outlook so broadened. Not only was Dave profiting by the cure, but, as the story was repeated, even Stevie, who had known the father, learned a lot. He was shocked and amazed.

Stevie said he guessed you didn't really ever know anyone awfully well, and if you did want to get to know them it might be a smart idea to use drugs and save a lot of time.

When Ike saw the C.O. the same day, one thing had become clear. The Red Cross Authorities confirmed his doubts. Marianne had lied. She was not pregnant. By request from London she had left the base a few days ago. That Ike knew. But from Stevie he heard the details of her departure. Crying out at first about the injustice done to her, about the

ingratitude for all the trouble she had taken in looking after the boys, she gradually mellowed down humanly voicing grief and hurt pride—and the possible wrong her eagerness and tempestuous nature had caused. After all, Ike thought, she too was a problem child. She too was fighting to keep going in unnatural circumstances.

Now that they had safely removed her from Dave, he could generously expand his private sympathy towards her. She defended her pride with threats which she hoped would enable her to exert her power over Dave and over his life. Poor Marianne would knock herself silly until perhaps she might rise to more material and spiritual understanding. Ike reverted thought back to his number one patient.

A cable from Dave's father that was loaded with priorities and long involved words said Dave's mother had died quietly a few days before. The father had gone to her in those last hours, and seen that she was comfortable. He wanted Dave to know that he, too, was unhappy. He said that, like Job's boils, his hate for Dave's mother had disappeared. The father wanted forgiveness from Dave.

The cable also said that Dave's brother crashed out in the Pacific the previous week. Outside of a few bones broken, he was all right.

With this ammunition, Ike went to the sensitive Dave. For three days Ike nursed Dave himself. The C.O. unconventionally suggested Dave be taken away and shown England. For weeks Dave rammed about the country, and Ike greeted a new Dave at a

Mariannese Liberator base somewhere in England.

Yes Dave was a new man. But one thing disturbed Ike above all. Dave's reactions had changed. His mind had seemed to chemicalize so completely that there was not a grain of soft emotion left. Was that good or bad? How would Dave react? Had Ike created a monster? Was the monster capable of happiness? How would love affect Dave? Who was this new Dave? Time was sure to tell that story—but time is an idiotic barrier to accomplishments sometimes. One thing for certain, the Air Forces could not be accused of lacking humanness as far as he was concerned—they all had re-lived Dave's life with him.

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CHAPTER XV

Now Ike had to have more outside help. Dave was on the verge of being normal again—if any of us ever are normal. But he was in the grip of a new, none-too-healthy reticence about talking. Maybe it was simple reaction—a touch of shame over having talked so much during the reign of the blue capsules.

Ike cast about for new allies until he remembered a couple of sergeants on the base. One was Pappy Adams' orderly, Jimmy. The other was an assistant to the public relations officer, and everyone called him "Appie." The latter was no ordinary GI, and Ike knew it. Appie had a beautiful education. He had knocked about the world a lot. And best of all he knew how to tell silly little stories of the kind all of us like.

So Ike arranged for stage-managed bull sessions. This is how they went :

At Nissen hut B.O.Q. dash 201, two sergeants were conducting school in the best " little red school house " tradition. The two sergeants were preaching the gospel of Americana to several tiny, dirty-faced local urchins who frequented the base because of the excellent cuisine, big talk with the big boys, bumming chewing gum and generally sizing up the strange Americans. The sergeants enjoyed the urchins, whom they could boss about, and who did minor jobs to pay for these privileges.

The sergeants' were exploiting their classroom

tactics. Jimmy was expounding at no mean length on the subject of George Washington's virtues both as a man and as a superfine President. Then one of the little kids clapped thunder into Jimmy's face. He began by asking an apparently simple question.

"Was George Washington married?"

Indignantly Jimmy answered, "Of course he was married. Of course he was married. All good Presidents are married." Jimmy was terribly annoyed.

"Well I don't know about the United States," the urchin continued, "but over here Mister Yank, some aren't, you know!"

The comment only grazed the minds of the two sergeants—but to Dave and Ike there was lots of humor in those words "you know." They were symbolic of a faithful England which for years had been a happy hunting ground for politicians of the Lord type who call themselves "Conservative Party" or something equally incongruous. But then another gem dropped.

Then the spokesman for the urchins volleyed again, "Was George Washington a Lord?"

By now Jimmy was livid with rage. "Listen, of course George Washington wasn't a Lord. We don't have Lords in America."

"Why not?" The urchin screwed his face up with astonishment.

"Because we just don't." Jimmy was stumped for an adequate answer. He resorted to a comparison.

"Well, they haven't made Joe Stalin a Lord yet, have they?"

"They don't have to," retorted the youngster.

"And why, may I ask?" Jimmy was being unwittingly shifted from the offensive to the defensive.

"'Cause my daddy said that Joe Stalin will get everything he wants, anyway, 'cause he's almost as good a bluffer as me."

The conversation finally exploded and Jimmy told the kids to scram and he'd see them another time.

The sergeants were talking. Several of the boys joined the party. The officers insisted that the sergeants stay and have a beer. There was Pappy, Joe, Stevie, Ike, Dave and the sergeants Jimmy and Appie.

Was Dave really cured? What was he thinking? The sergeants were talking. Appie was leading the bull session.

"Before we left the States, our commanding Officer gathered us together. He spoke to us about something. Don't remember what. I do remember one statement he made, because I thought he was nuts. 'I want,' he said, 'this war to be as much fun for you men as possible.' He had a scarred cheek from the First World War, and it looked pretty red in the Florida sun as he told us, 'don't fool yourself; it can be fun.'

"And the old bastard was right, too. War's a hell of a nasty mess. I've waited on our land strip for friends to return who only a few short hours before were cracking jokes and drinking coffee. They

wouldn't joke any more. Sherman was right as hell.

"The damnedest part is that a soldier could never stand the strain nor continue to fight if that were the whole story. Goddammit, war can be fun. I don't mean fun the way Bruno Mussolini said bombs were beautiful when they fell to earth 'looking like flowers.' "

Appie was gushing as he continued :

" When we disembarked in that God-awful blacked-out dockyard, somewhere in England, as they say it, we had to string out in single file. I ended up in No. 1 position following a uniformed character down railroad tracks and across alleyways. The entire group was following. We thought we spoke English ; but jeez, we soon found a new lingo once we set foot on British soil. The man ahead—I never found out if he was a ship's officer, a dockyard official or a misplaced London Bobby—would turn around every twenty seconds and call instructions to me. The words sounded like " Wha hew hofer now, what ? " I was jittery, so I'd turn to the one behind me and ask, 'What did he say ?' This would go all the way down the line . . . 'What did he say ?' . . . 'What did he say ?' . . . 'What did he say ?' . . . Finally the answer : 'I don't know.' . . . 'I don't know.' . . . would start up the line, only to be met halfway by a 'What did he say ?' about a new mess of mush from our guide. I just kept following him, and the rest followed me, so it didn't seem to make much difference. We finally got on our train. Sometimes I wonder if that guy was just making chit-chat with me, asking

about the voyage, our health, or something. If he was, that echo back along the line must have made a strange impression."

Jimmy broke in.

"Listen, probably the damndest thing for us was to get used to English beer. Our first time off, there was a wholesale rush for the nearest pub and we ordered some beer. At first we didn't care for English beer, but then we found that the brew closest to our own was light ale. In most pubs the barmaid starts reaching down for light ale when we walk in.

"The barmaids were another thing that took quite a while to get used to. We were used to burly men behind a bar. Maybe their talk was dumb, but at least it was masculine enough to give you a feeling that it wouldn't be out of order to take off your coat and use a 'damn' once in a while. Over here, we found that in nine cases out of ten there were women behind the bar. Usually they were lasses far past their 'teens with the most astounding hair known to womanhood. Maybe it's a rule for English barmaids to have hair that's uncombable and wiry. There's a sergeant in our outfit that was a hairdresser in civilian life. It would take all his will power and most of my strength to keep him from climbing over the counter and giving most barmaids a quick hand-set. One night he got away from me and was advancing on the lady of the establishment with a wicked gleam in his eye and his hands clenching and unclenching. I got to him before he reached her and led him back to the table. She never forgave me,

and I had to stop going to the place. She told a friend that he was the first man that had come toward her looking like that in twenty years."

Appie started talking again. There was only a cynical look on Dave's face. He seemed to be appraising the conversation—enjoying it. Appie was telling another story. This time he sloughed off GI slang and spoke as he would at home.

"One day we were standing on a street corner hoping for a ride to Norwich when a Crossley stopped and a man offered us a lift. It turned out that he had been with the *London Times* for thirty-one years. He was very British and very *London Times*-ish. He gave us a short lecture on journalism as we rode along, and asked if either of us had been connected with newspaper work. I modestly admitted that I had been in the advertising business before I came into the Army. He was not impressed. I told him that the previous week in London I had met the editor of one of the papers. 'We,' he said, and I could see the whole staff of the *Times* lining up behind him, 'don't think much of his paper.' 'The *Times*,' he said, 'is the greatest paper in the world.' I said no more.

"After a little time a friend of mine, a sergeant who had been groping for something to say, broke the silence. 'Is the *Times*,' he asked, 'the paper that Lord Beaverbrook owns?' Our driver exploded. My friend apologised. We drove in stony silence. Finally he relented. He handed us a copy of the *Times*. He said perhaps we would be interested in

looking at it. We were generous with our praise. He accepted it as coals to Newcastle. Finally he said, 'Something in there you might be interested in. Story about General MacArthur.' He hesitated for a minute, then questioning, continued. 'One of your chaps, isn't he?'

"*Times* or no *Times*, that was too much. He pulled up to the curb to let us out. I drew myself up to my full height. 'General MacArthur,' I announced, 'belongs to the ages.' My friend applauded. We marched off. Just before we turned into the Coach and Horses for a strong drink, we stopped at the corner. My friend bought a *Daily Express*. I bought a *News Chronicle*. 'One of your chaps, isn't he? Humph!'"

"*Attention please. Attention please. This is an all-out practice alert. Battle stations. Repeat. This is an all-out practice alert. Battle stations. Over.*"

As the loudspeaker broke in and the noise again began to be part of a new chapter in Dave's life, Ike wondered how it all would affect him this time.

Appie wouldn't keep quiet. He talked on.

"This may not be a nice thing to say about England while I am a guest here, but there are rats in this country. There are rats and mice of all descriptions, and many of them visit the Nissen hut that I live in. They like to eat chocolate, crackers, bread, candy, letters, cigars, gloves and anything else around. They also get cold in the night. One morning one of our sergeants, who is usually very slow and unco-operative about getting up, leaped out of bed with great

alacrity and much noise. Just then a mouse jumped out of his bed with more alacrity, but less noise. That afternoon, with a cat under his arm, our Jimmy arrived back at the hut. It was an unhealthy looking cat and it was shedding hair profusely. 'This will fix those rats,' he said.

"He laid the cat down and it promptly went to sleep. In the morning the rodents had made their usual haul, and the cat was still asleep. The sergeants were downcast, but decided to give the creature another chance. However, when I returned at lunch-time I found the cat asleep on my bed and hair all over my blanket. I gently hurled the animal outside. After all, no mice had been sleeping in MY bed. We have tried quite a few things since then to get rid of the rats, but we haven't been very successful. Just last night we spread some poisoned cheese about the hutment and said, 'This will fix *some* rat anyway,' and looked at me meaningly. I once borrowed a jar of cheese that the sergeant had received from home, and I don't think he liked it. But if he thinks I'm going to take some cheese I know is poisoned, he can think again. And who is he calling a rat, anyway?"

"*Attention please. Attention please. Practice Alert all clear. Over.*"

"The English method of dancing is a good deal different from our own. On the British dance floor, you get into the swing of things and continue round and round in the same direction as on a roller-skating rink. And you'd better continue, too. My first

experience was at a little dance in a small town. I had as a partner a young lady approximately two and a half feet shorter than myself. We took a few steps. Then I took a half-step backward, releasing one hand and bending my head to say a few words, since my dancing is ninety per cent. conversational anyhow. The next thing I knew I was flying through the air with great speed. My little partner, who evidently had anticipated the attack, was running alongside waiting for me to land. I did so loudly and ungracefully. She pulled me to one side as about twenty pairs of feet went whirling past. I watched from the sidelines for a long time before venturing out there again. Then I knew how to do it. I waited for an opening, fainted once, then dove in and with no hesitation of any sort did a four hundred and forty yard dash around the hall, which was approximately fourteen laps. I stopped for no chit-chat, once burned.

“ One night, determined to relax and enjoy myself, I chose a charming young number and swept her onto the floor. We glided about beautifully and I kept up a running conversation that would have done justice to a phonograph. I complimented her on her dancing, her hair, her eyes. I discussed England, the war, the RAF. I built up Churchill and the WAAF's in general. In short, I did what the soldiers entitle a beautiful snow job. When the music stopped I stood and clapped enthusiastically. She mumbled ‘ thank you ’ and walked back to her solitary seat against the wall. A friend of mine danced with her

afterward and mentioned me. She looked up at him. 'Talks a lot,' she complained, 'doesn't he?' No, I don't like GI dances."

Appie was part of the machined GI humor. His was the balance, the influence that was to affect everyone. But how? He was unstoppable.

"One of the things that everyone was most interested in on arrival here was to hear some of the German propaganda broadcasts that we had heard so much about. One of the first ones we heard was Lord Haw-Haw presenting an unpretty picture of the American troops. He denounced with vehemence 'the arrogance and superior attitude that the soldiers of Roosevelt were directing toward the British people,' and advised the English to 'Grab the next American soldier by the seat of the pants and the scruff of the neck' and hurl him into the gutter where he belongs. There was much more of it which was for the most part highly entertaining, although a few of the men became a bit annoyed and we had to protect the radio from a barrage of heavy shoes, steel helmets and the like. I frankly enjoyed it, although I must admit that for weeks afterward I would glance behind me apprehensively for fear Haw-Haw had won a follower who would suddenly attack me from the rear."

"*Attention please. Attention please. Will the four Squadron Commanders report to the War Room at 1339 hours? Repeat. Will the four Squadron Commanders report to the War Room at 1330 hours? Over.*"

Everyone discontentedly fidgeted with the intro-

duction of the squawk box, then turned again to listen.

“ I was sitting in the mess hall one night wrestling with a piece of meat that was evidently made of the new synthetic rubber that we had been reading about when my corporal came over to the table and suggested a trip into Norwich.

“ ‘ Okay,’ I said, stabbing at the potential tennis ball vainly, ‘ we can eat in there.’

“ The town was rather quiet that evening and even at the Sampson and Hercules Ballroom we were bored. We wandered into a little pub that served glasses of beer so tall that you had to set them on the floor to take the first swallow. There were two girls in there, and one of them struck me as quite attractive. We sat looking at them for a while. Finally I asked them if they would have one with us. They agreed, so I went up to the counter and got four more. When I returned, the corporal was reciting Lincoln’s Gettysburg address with gestures to the gal I had had my eye on. I still don’t think those are the gestures that go with Lincoln’s Gettysburg address, but then I don’t suppose it matters a great deal. The girl who was left as my partner was rather attractive, but seemed very young. In fact, she seemed so young that after I had made a few remarks and she had answered by nodding her head, I pulled her thumb out of her mouth and made her say ‘ Da ’ to prove she was old enough to talk. You have to be a little careful about things like that, since the English think

it a bit funny if Americans go around with girls not old enough to talk."

"Attention please. Attention please. There will be a presentation of awards at 1330 hours in the old briefing room. All combat personnel will check with their orderly rooms to see if awards are due them. Repeat. There will be a presentation of awards at 1330 hours in the old briefing room. All combat personnel will check with their orderly rooms to see if awards are due them. Over."

The noise nuisance subsided. Dave was smoking and smiling. Appie spilled more words. Free time took him from Norwich to London as he raved on.

"The traffic problem in London has eased up a good deal with gas rationing, but I would rather face Times Square at its busiest with my eyes closed than brave the Commando raids in Piccadilly Circus after 10 p.m. The Circus is the headquarters for the Ladies of the Evening, and after a few experiences there, the Americans straightway rechristened them the Piccadilly Commandos. I have been accosted in New York, Chicago and points west. Some years ago I even encountered a few of the Rue Blondel lasses in Paris. But I take off my hat to the girls of Piccadilly. They may not be eminently successful, but they certainly leave their mark. They not only proposition you, but they bat the hell out of you while they're doing it.

"My first encounter on their home ground was one evening about eleven o'clock. A little disappointed at the early closing hour of the night spots, I was

making my way reluctantly back to the hotel, thinking unhappily that the Stork Club in New York was just beginning to get lively. Innocently I turned down Piccadilly, picking my way through the pitch darkness. Suddenly I was struck in the pit of the stomach with a force that knocked the wind out of me. Coughing and sputtering, I regained my breath and discovered that the object that had temporarily incapacitated me was a feminine head.

“ ‘Sorry, Yank,’ it said unconcernedly, ‘Got a cigarette ?’

“ ‘No,’ I answered rudely, starting on.

“ Oomph. Again I coughed and fought for breath. She must have had at least a twenty-foot running start. I again refused to supply a smoke. Warily now I made my way along. I saw one bearing down on me : a dim, hurtling shadow. I stepped into a doorway and got a crack in the kidney. ‘Got a cigarette ?’ queried the cracker. I didn’t reply.

“ I got a minor sort of revenge. I neatly side-stepped one Commando who must have been hitting thirty miles an hour as she flew by. Remembering my basketball experience, I gave her the hip as she passed, and had the delightful experience of seeing her carom off into two co-workers who were bowled over like ninepins. I was not to escape yet, however. As I made my way across the street, one dashed out from the shelter of an Underground entrance and left her mark.

“ This time I surrendered a cigarette and asked an academic question. ‘Is it in your constitution that

you must knock a man about a bit before you approach him, or am I just unpopular ? ’

“ ‘ Oh you,’ she said, playfully cracking two of my ribs with an iron elbow, ‘ Oh you.’

“ I hurried back to my celibate couch. I have never noticed the ugly head that sex is supposed to be continually rearing, but I have felt its brass knuckles. Meet you at Piccadilly ? Okay, but not after dark brother, not after dark.”

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CHAPTER XVI

“WHEN double daylight saving and war time came into effect most of us thought things were being carried a little too far. I, for one, hadn’t gone to bed in the daytime, except for occasions when the sun had inexplicably risen earlier than usual, since I first donned long trousers. During the summer months in England, however, it didn’t really get dark until after eleven o’clock. Blackout time would come long before that and we would experience the strange feeling of walking in from the bright twilight to a pitch-dark Nissen hut.

“The insides of those huts were, without a doubt, the darkest and blackest things I have ever encountered. Narrow as they were, with beds jutting out on both sides, only a narrow corridor was left to walk down, and in the center of that was the pot-bellied stove. My own bed was the second from the door, and owing to my length I was forced to pull it out about ten inches into the corridor when I climbed in. If I didn’t my feet were in continual contact with the thin metal of the side, and that made sleeping uncomfortable. It had disadvantages, however, for the only possible method of latecomers’ getting down to their own bunks was to grope for the iron rail at the head of each bed, and move the hands from bed to bed, as they made their way down the aisle.

“My bed, jutting out almost a foot, naturally

spoiled the symmetry of the affair and, as a result, it was an unusual night that didn't find some returning soldier getting a firm grasp on my nose, or ear, when he was searching for the rail to guide him to his dream sack. One can become accustomed to anything in time, and I finally got so I didn't mind an occasional push in the face as the wanderers returned. They would quickly withdraw their hands, since it was as much of a shock to them as it was to me. From time to time, however, someone who had been celebrating in town would return with a stubborn streak, and that was when I was likely to take punishment.

"One night a pal of mine came back, grabbed the end of one bed, steadied himself, then continued to the next two cots. Here, with his left hand, he firmly clutched my not unpretentious nose. Bracing himself firmly on the bed next door to my nose, he chose that particular place to stand and think over the events of the evening. I moaned, pushed and thrashed about, but his grip was unrelenting. After about three minutes of agony, he released his hold and continued on down the aisle muttering to himself. As he reached his bed, I heard his monologue.

" 'Fine damn country, this is,' he was saying, 'Anti-freeze rum and black market scotch, and when you get home the bloody beds fight back. Fine damn country.'

"One morning I had to go over to another AAF Station about fifteen miles away, and the Sergeant of the Guard called up and asked if there was room to take an enlisted man back who had spent the night at

our field. We told him yes, and in a little while a rather worried, uncomfortable, private appeared. He looked a bit the worse for wear, and his clothes obviously had been slept in.

"We spent most of the trip in silence, but finally my curiosity got the better of me and I asked him what he had been doing over here and how he happened to end up in the guardhouse. He had evidently been wanting to tell his story, for he burst into it with some vehemence.

"It seemed that a colonel had been driving back to camp the night before, and just as he left the outskirts of town had had the car stop next to the private. The colonel made a practice of looking about for stranded men. It was not too unusual for one occasionally to miss the truck and have a long hard walk left ahead of him. He stopped this time and asked my companion if he had missed the truck. Upon receiving an affirmative answer, the colonel told him to get in and he would give him a ride back to camp.

"The private hadn't been over here very long, but after about twenty-five minutes of driving he realised that they were going in the wrong direction for his station, and turned around to say something about it. Upon turning around however, he had caught a glimpse of the silver leaf of a lieutenant-colonel, and was so taken aback that he lost his voice. He had taken it for granted that it was a lieutenant, or at most a captain who had stopped to give him a ride. His only previous experience with a colonel had been

a very bitter one. He was loath to become involved again. Anyway, at this point the colonel had closed his eyes, and was evidently resting, so the private disconsolately watched more and more territory being put between him and his station. Finally, they arrived at camp. He dismounted, saluted smartly and immediately turned himself into the guardhouse.

"He had my sympathy, but the story was too good, and though I tried to hold it back, a smile broke out, and suddenly both the driver and I were practically doubled up with hysterics. Our passenger was quite annoyed, and spoke to neither of us again until we dropped him off at his orderly room. Later on that day I met him at the mess hall before we started on our way back. He greeted me quite enthusiastically.

" 'How did you come out?' I asked, knowing that his meeting with the first sergeant had been the cause of his earlier unrest.

" 'Everything's okay,' he answered. 'The first sergeant told me he knew damn well I couldn't make up one that good.'

"The Air Force has always been known for the extreme youth of its officers, and it's not an uncommon sight to see a lieutenant-colonel who just washes his face in the morning instead of shaving. I think the enlisted men have become so used to it by now that if one were to see his newly-born son wearing captain's bars he would salute him and continue about his business. The Air Forces officers, too, particularly the flying officers, have a more lenient outlook on relations with enlisted men than

officers of other branches. It may be against all Army principles for officers and enlisted men to have a convivial drink together, but there are very few cases where the officers lose any respect by it. In fact, the almost inevitable result is the feeling of the enlisted man that the officer is not only a gentleman by Act of Congress, but also a good guy—which never hurt any Army. For my part, however, I stay clear of officers once I get to town. This is no snobbishness on my part, but rather a rule for self-protection. I have horrible visions of that last rum bringing out the Dorothy Dix in me and my throwing my arm around some major's shoulder, saying : ' Don't worry, kid, it will all turn out right in the end.'

" There is so much propaganda put out on both sides in regard to the British civilian and the American soldier getting along together that most of the time when they are together they exude so much sweetness and light that it's obnoxious. One night I was sitting in the King's Arms pub, near our station, rather bored with things in general. An Englishman, in his early forties, was sitting next to me and we struck up a conversation. He bought me a drink of rum, and I gave him an American cigarette. ' Your cigarettes are so much better than ours,' he said, lighting mine and his own. ' Oh, I don't know,' I answered, ' it's all what you're used to. I think we probably force our cigarettes on you and you have to say that in self-defense.'

" ' Oh no,' he denied vigorously, ' They are much better than ours.' I gave him a package of Luckies

that I had in my pocket. He bought me another rum. We went on talking along those general lines for some time. I bought him a rum, he bought me one, I bought him another. I kept remembering the little words of advice that we had had thrust at us in 'A Short Guide TO Great Britain.' He kept remembering what the Ministry of Information pamphlets had said about the visiting soldiers. Things got stickier and stickier.

"Finally he told me that America won the last war. I said they did not. In fact, they had had nothing to do with it. He said that if it had not been for America, the Allies would have lost the war, would have starved to death afterwards, and that the United States had not even been paid its just war debts. I told him that the United States was a money-grabbing country that had done nothing in the last war on the battlefield but grabbed all the money it could, and had made a vast fortune on the blood of others.

"He hurled his glass onto the floor. 'You can't say that about the United States,' he declared. 'Well, you can't say what you did about England,' I retorted. We pushed each other around. Finally the MPs separated us and started to lead me out of the pub.

"'England never did anything in its life for anyone but England,' he shrieked.

"The MPs were dragging me now. I struggled and screamed the last word as we went through the door.

‘All Americans are rats,’ I called madly. ‘All Americans are rats.’ ”

“It was hard for me to get used to the blackout,” said Appie. “I figure you might as well make your mind up right from the start that you are going to accept it. After the first few experiences of knocking myself out against telegraph poles, apologising to mail boxes and tumbling off curbs, I got used to it. Now it’s almost as routine an experience as eating powdered eggs, weak coffee and mud. There are certain precautions that a guy should follow.

“For my money if you must make the acquaintance of a young lady in a blackout, it’s your affair. But the wisest thing to do is to remain in the blackout with her. There are many new versions of Cinderella in English blackouts. Lasses who look nice in the dark and sound heavenly change into pumpkins, or worse, when you get them under a light.

“Never decide a half-hour before closing time to make your way back to that pub you were in during the afternoon, the one with the great white front that must shine in the dark and is only half a block away. As soon as the blackout starts, all pubs are picked up and moved to the other end of town. And where there were huge double doors before, there is now nothing but little slits that pygmies might be able to slip through. If you leave the pub that you are in for one just down the street, you are as good as licked and undoubtedly will end up in either Westminster Abbey or St. Pancras Station.

“It cannot be too strongly emphasized that no

matter how tired you get, a blackout is not the place for you to sit down and rest. There are only three places where you can rest during a blackout. One is a coal pile that ruins your clothes ; another is in a window box that's the pride and joy of some old lady who keeps buckets of scalding water for just such occasions. The third is the lap of a gal who is in the lap of a Canadian soldier who is eleven feet tall and six feet wide. It may look like something entirely different—a wall—a bench, or a curb—but it is always and inevitably one of those three.

“The final rule for blackouts is a simple one. Never run. It makes no difference if you can see lights one hundred feet away on the level of your eyes, someone is bound to build a wall before you reach them, and you will knock yourself out on it. Wires are stretched across the roads, holes are dug and walls are built as soon as you begin to run in a blackout. As for curbs, or ‘kerbs,’ as the British spell them, they are not kerbs at all, but jerky escalators laid down along Coney Island specifications, and move up and down as soon as you try to get over them.”

“Another thing,” Appie lectured. “In England you never go into a bar and order a scotch and soda. You walk inside, look around furtively and then whisper to the barmaid, ‘Any spirits?’ You make your voice sound academically interested but non-committal. You are not ordering spirits, you are merely enquiring if there are any. If you keep the anxiety out of your voice, you are reasonably certain

of getting some. When the barmaid answers in the affirmative, you ponder a second or two, then say: "I'll have a drop, please." In England you always drink 'drops of spirits,' never a shot of whiskey or a pony of brandy.

"When you get your drop of spirits, you raise it to your lips, say 'Cheers' and drink it. If you don't say 'cheers' you are a social outcast and probably will never get another drink in that pub as long as you live."

"Attention please. Attention please. The following crews will report to their Squadron's operations immediately; Smith, Jones, Petroskey, Callahan, Wilson and Taft. Repeat. The following crews will report to their Squadron's operations immediately: Smith, Jones, Petroskey, Callahan, Wilson and Taft. Over."

Life might go on in the base, the squawk box might go on, but so did Appie. Ike felt a few dozen days of this long life of talk would neutralize Dave and was providing a soothing tonic. After all Appie was full of simplicity and Dave needed simpleness.

"Some day I want to meet a general. I have seen quite a few of them, and I even threw a salute at General Eaker when I saw him approaching in a staff car. He did not return it, but I don't think there was anything personal in it, as his car turned a corner about one hundred feet before it reached me. When I do meet a General I am going to be very polite, but I am also going to assert myself and say a thing or two to him. We have had generals arrive at our field to present decorations, to make inspections,

to attend briefings: we have had them here for practically everything that generals do.

"Each time I hear a general is coming, I set frantically to work. I shine all my shoes or all the ones that I can't slip out of sight into a barracks bag, clean my rifle, wash the windows in the office, make all sorts of preparations. Then I sit at my desk in fear and trembling and wait all day in excited expectation. The generals not only never get to my shoes or my rifle, but they never even get near my squadron area. Once a general did come down and inspect the workshops, but did he step inside the office? Certainly not. Our colonel stepped inside the door and called our captain. I sat in the office looking at my sad expression in the highly polished floor and shielded my eyes from the blinding reflections from my spotless windows.

"Yes, some day I want to meet a general; and I am going to hold out my hands and say to him. 'Look, old man, no one has more respect for you boys than I have, but I wish you would give some recognition to those of us who are permanently changed because of your visits. No recognition do we get, and look—dishpan hands.'

"One of the most astonishing things about the Army is that it has you do so many different things. One private who had been a minor sort of New York playboy before he became a dogface came up to me after a hard week as latrine orderly.

"'Brother,' he said, mopping a dripping brow, 'when I get out of here I am going to be known as

the Washroom Attendant's Friend. Never less than a buck tip from now on. They earn it."

"I once talked myself into something similar. I was sitting in the office one day when I said, 'These windows are filthy. You can hardly see out of them.' Our captain looked at me meaningly.

" 'What am I saying? What am I saying?' I screamed madly. I tried everything I knew. I claimed that clean windows shone too brilliantly in the sun and broke the camouflage rules. I pecked madly at the typewriter, making up new reports on the weather, tomorrow's breakfast and that gal from Gretna Green. Still I felt his eyes on me.

" 'All right,' I finally said, inwardly cursing my big mouth, 'I'll wash the bloody windows.'

"You get so used to doing everything yourself that for months I carefully refrained from saying anything about opening a second front. I was afraid they'd tell me to go ahead and start one."

CHAPTER XVII

JUNE came at last. June came with arms filled with little flowers that grew in an unkempt field. But June also brought the invasion. Flowers were trodden into mudded runways and under strong sweeping wings. But who cares for flowers? Wait, wait, I'll tell you.

Appie stopped talking at last. But talking often provides its own compensation. Talking may be magnetic in such a way as to unite men with their dreams, and dreams with men. Where was Dave's mind travelling? To a dreamland? What did he have to do with flowers?

To Dave, conversation had become an eyeglass through which he could observe abstractedly anyone, anything. Besides, words to Dave, were as wet hay that mildews in the loft. There was no good in them. Words only seemed to span the time from those cold, damp winter days to the cold, damp June days. And don't forget it; England this year was cold and wet, both winter and June.

But between winter and June many things happened. There were "milk runs" to Paris, the easy trips. There were missions to Berlin. There were missions to try to wipe out the flying bomb launching platforms at Pas de Calais. They first started these raids in December 1943. There were raids on oil refineries. Then, there was one thing that Pappy Adams' crew will remember forever.

Dave noticed first. Then everyone noticed. They all saw. Pappy Adams crew saw the Ghost of Paris.

Paris is shadowed by a lonely, gaunt ghost. A friendly ghost. Few men ever see this Ghost of Paris, ever meet her. But those who do, know her well. Perhaps they were shot up over there. Perhaps the ghost protected them. Perhaps not. But you may rest assured they know her. Yes, the ghost is a she ghost, as feminine in her loveliness as that city herself.

The ghost drapes herself in a leisurely, confident fashion about Paris by daylight, and rises only to greet the night. She is part of the emotion, and most of the protection, the boys get over the Vichy guns there.

One day between winter and June Pappy's crew were in a big formation that went to Paris to bomb a plant near the junction of the Marne and Seine rivers, on the south-eastern side of Paris. On the way to the target they circled wide around the city, then turning they started in on their bomb run. Pappy was at the controls and Dave, long since returned to flying, rose up in his seat and looked toward Paris as the Liberator banked, turning left, from south to north.

A low defiant mist was bedded about the base of the Eiffel Tower. The very blueness of the mist commanded Dave's remembering attention. He stared, climbing higher to watch. As he looked down through an otherwise clear sky, he saw a ghost-like figure in her full shape, her full proportion, her

majestic beauty. There were no sordid, meatless bones painted on her. Rather the mist shaped as a girl's body to the extent of flowing hair that dropped back over her shoulders. There were dark cloud shadings and features portrayed by the white cumulus clouds. In one hand she clutched the Eiffel Tower.

Paris was covered. Yes, Paris was protected.

The bomber crews prepared to release their chunks of TNT.

As Fritz got ready to drop his bombs from 'Flak Alley' even Fritz saw. He saw the Ghost's other hand about the target, exposing on one side German gun batteries and, on the other, the plant, their target. Fritz talked softly over the interphone as black cordite burst about them. Nineteen shells went through 'Flak Alley,' but not a man was hurt, not a hair was touched. Every man on the ship looked as Fritz spoke. They all saw her. No they'll never forget the Ghost of Paris even though many men to-day still have never seen her.

As the crew had grown through the months, they heard of and saw the famed Abbeville Kids. The Abbeville Kids, they contended, were the real sportsmen of the Luftwaffe. Now most of them are split up and are squadron leaders in various places. But the Abbeville Kids never lose their identity. Richthofen, their leader, was shot down by Arizona Slim, but the kind of war he as a German and the boys as Allies created was the kind of war you could fight only high in the space-less sky.

The Abbeville Kids instigated all the tactics the

Germans later used against Fortress and Liberator formations. They were the first to do the slow roll into the centre of the formation. To counter this tactic we installed the chin turret. Later the Kids flew cross formations, then began the angle dive and the rocket attack.

But one thing that made our boys fighting mad was when one of the Abbeville Kids shot through the formation at four hundred miles an hour, with huge American flags painted all over his fuselage. It was the greatest tonic for guys to want to fight a war they honestly didn't believe they had anything to do with. This was not a challenge of democracy—this was the challenge of a man's pride. A much more satisfying reason to fight.

Of all the targets the group had been assigned to smash up, nearly everyone agreed that hitting the oil refineries was the most fun. Perhaps because they liked oil targets the group had been nicknamed "The Black Gold Miners."

Comparatively, the gold rush of 1849 was a tame thing. Then men fought Nature and each other for riches, true; but only wealth was at stake. Now, with the future of the world in the balance, the group were engaged in a gold rush of 1944 that was far more desperate, and much more important than the Golden Fleece which drew mankind to California ninety-five years ago. For the surest answer to the Luftwaffe, the pilotless bomb and the German tanks locked in battle with Allied positions in Europe was to cut off from Hitler what he had called his "black

gold," the oil supply of the Third Reich, which everyone agreed might more appropriately be called Germany's "black blood."

But hitting the oil refineries had not been altogether easy. The trips were long and tiresome, for the targets were deep inside German Europe. The oil wells were appealing targets, but they took the minutest precision, for the only part of a refinery that makes any difference is the distillery and power house. Another thing was the terrific amount of gasoline the Luftwaffe required to keep going. And not only the Luftwaffe. The Germans, the boys were told, use five billion seven hundred and fifty million gallons of oil a year. Some bucketful that! Blowing up gasoline meant blowing up the Luftwaffe on the ground, and that was more appealing than even watching the gas tanks explode, and fire the sky.

One day the boys went to Politz. Everyone had studied about Politz for a long time. They knew the "ins" and "outs" of the Burgess method of producing synthetic oil. They had studied it diligently. They knew about hydrogenation plants, about how the Nazis take soft bituminous coal and mix it with crude oil to refine it into various stages of their product. They knew where the lakes were placed about the Politz refinery. They knew the location of the German super-highways, or Autobahns. They had seen pictures comparing the forest, the railroads, the towns and the various junctions.

Four times before, their bombers had failed to put Politz out of action. This time we must not fail.

On each previous mission there had been terrific smoke-screens which covered the check points, such as the canals, the lakes, the rivers and other identification. Then one June day the Liberators took off and assembled in the sky before first light. They passed Denmark and then on up into the Baltic. Circling south, they forced their way into Germany. On the very split second those Liberators hit the bomb run—checked the lakes and the rivers they had studied so long.

But something happened that almost cancelled the effectiveness of their mission. One of the important points in identification is the color of the target. The lead bombardier was almost fooled. The target was the wrong color. It looked more like stacks of newly sawed lumber. There were only a hundred and twenty seconds to think. He reclassified his target mentally and prepared to drop. They were crashing down altitude at top speed, and then the ship levelled. There was no more time. Smoke was covering the target; and a second strange thing happened.

The smoke, moving across the target, seemed to give the refinery an apparent motion, a miraged motion.

The apparent motion confused the lead bombardier, and the first bombs dropped slightly short; but the second element compensated, and the colonel said later those were the most beautiful fires he ever had seen. That day the lead ship accumulated twenty-six holes in her fuselage.

The smoke screen that day appeared as a thick

blanket of fog over Politz, but often low-hung clouds make it easier to get the proper angle of attack. Way down below the smoke generators were visible. Small boats in the tiny lakes about the target moved around like water bugs. The boats swarmed out over the lakes in perfect pattern. But one Liberator dropped a couple of bombs into the lake, and the smoke boats made a 190-degree turn and got out of the way.

On the way home the boys saw what the rest of the Eighth Air Force had been doing. Targets had been hit at Hamburg, Magdebourg and Hanover, some ninety miles to the south'ard of their route home. Plumes of smoke rose to about twenty thousand feet, and then the smoke got caught in the upper stratosphere and was spread out in shapes like large pancakes, or gigantic thunder clouds.

There were other trips as interesting, but the boys thought of them in kind. The kind that were tough and the kind that were easy. The oil kind were always tough. One day they had an easy trip, but like the time they had seen the Ghost of Paris, they remembered it well.

The target was Leipzig. Only a few groups were to bomb a factory there. Fritz's grandfather was buried not far from Leipzig. No one knew what got into the C.O. that day, but he fixed it so they went right over the spot where Fritz's grandpa was lying in the sod.

Fritz was awfully grateful. It's too bad he missed the factory, but according to the story the bombs

landed in the local police station and killed a whole lot of his pro-Nazi relatives. These things of war do happen.

“There will be an inspection of this station to-morrow morning by Brigadier General Smith. Squadron Commanders will be responsible for the appearance of the living sites. Repeat: There will be an inspection of this station to-morrow by Brigadier General Smith. Squadron Commanders will be responsible for the appearance of their respective living sites. Over.”

Station inspections always brought about those meetings between the squadron commanders and the squadron adjutant. The first sergeant always lays down the law; cut all grass—police and air all barracks—no leaking pipes—no trash in the ditches—mop all barracks. And so it goes in preparation for the appearance of a khaki-clad “His Majesty,” the inspecting general.

B.O.Q. dash 201 was an ideal hut for the intelligence officers and the flight surgeon. It was, literally miles away from the usual route followed by the general, and after these many months no one but Wa-Wa worried about inspections. Of course, in the other part of the camp the GIs laboured, and certainly not for love.

During the inspection clean-up a GI barracks was a good place to go, either to get new jokes, borrow money or get a dice game going. In any event, if you went over there with the GIs you knew you’d get laughs. Reconstructing it, there was one GI who said he’d just written a letter home. He told

his wife to "take a good look at those four walls, honey, 'cause when I get home you're not going to see anything but the ceiling for a long, long time." Then there was a GI who complained because the chaplain wouldn't let him gamble on the Sabbath. Wearily he kept announcing, "This is an awful place; you can't make a dime on Sundays." And there was another boy who always used to frown and say now he knew what Paradise would be like: it would be the opposite of this.

One GI even had British politics figured out. "Yes," he said, "British politics are easy, Church, troops, jail, taxes. That's all; it's simple!" There was another boy who'd just come home from Germany. He promptly pointed to four holes in his trousers, but he didn't even have a scratch on his flesh. He said, "Listen, guy, flak might have your name on it, but not your serial number."

Then in the midst of work and getting ready for the inspection a provoking thing happened. They decided not to have the inspection after all. The news was coming out over the squawk box.

"The inspection scheduled has been cancelled. Repeat. The inspection scheduled has been cancelled. Over."

The noise from the squawk box died away. Back in B.O.Q. dash 201 things were, as usual, confused. Guys were talking and scrambling words to suit their fancy just mentioning things—people, circumstances.

Over in one corner of the room Ike was holding

forth to a newly arrived officer. He was, not too briefly, presenting the business which the younger officer, who was to be an assistant in the medical section, was soon to be confronted with. Ike finally got down to that question of venereal disease.

"No one seems to understand," Ike complained bitterly. Then he continued, "Most of the kids are careful, and pretty good lads. You won't have much trouble. They don't just fill out their time running about with bad women. Mind you, though, you'd think so to hear some people talk. Figures refute this business about the kids being such roughnecks.

"Basically, the dilemma for we doctors English-style is moods. The absence of sex life is partly responsible. But in whose army doesn't that exist? I'll bet my month's pay it's the same everywhere except maybe the Russians, who have women here and there attached to the fighting forces. There they tell me there is no mixing. But if you have your man, or a man a woman, you have him and the gals are so husky that no one over there tries to go gal-stealing.

"These moods are peculiar. They are created by situations; as for instance the apparent hopelessness of the married man's position in an army overseas, the never ending army routine life, awaiting invasion or the questions, when will it end? etcetera. One doctor from my home town actually has the exalted duty in the Army of latrine inspector. He's not very happy after seven years as a baby specialist."

"In our outfit," Ike continued, "there are a large

number of total sex abstainers. These fellows may be married or really in love, or in rarer cases because of morals. But ther're still hundreds upon hundreds of these guys."

"For my money," Ike was becoming very stern and said, "females and males have about the same ratio of monthly moods. I admit it seems far-fetched, but it's practically speaking, so. Men have their low spots in the month, and there is good reason to believe that there are hormones in a man that correlate to the females.' Regardless of scientific proof, each month the male gets nervous and depressed. Then he needs a satisfactory sex relationship. That begins the mood. If you don't believe me, then answer the question of why hermits go crazy.

"Men have no natural means to get rid of their excess energy if you wish to cliché it all. Some fellows have wet dreams, true. But you'll find most guys try to drink off their moods. That's often rough on the poor MP's. That's how it all starts. Officers don't attend V.D. lectures; therefore they are more apt to get caught. Combat crews get caught more than any other group, simply because they don't care. What difference does it make if they die tomorrow? Who are you to tell them different? Isn't the cure quick and effective?

"Of course the cure is the best we know, but really, Lieutenant, it will take ten years before we can really tell. I always use that argument because I know it's true. The GIs are little worry on the whole, so don't get too depressed."

Ike lit a cigar. "Anyhow, Lieutenant," he said, "Americans can't ride these English bicycles. The brakes on the handlebars send them head over heels about every twenty minutes around this joint. You'll get more cases of scrapes and broken bones from the bikes than you'll have to treat for V.D."

The Assistant Medico bid the boys good night, so long, and went on to his new billet.

"There will be an Officers Club dance on July 4th. Repeat. There will be an Officers Club dance on July 4th. All officers are requested to let the mess officer know whether or not they intend to bring dates. Over."

The boys drifted out of the hut. Ike received the announcement with mixed feelings. From sex teachings to more concrete things he thought of Claire—would she like to go to the dance? Perhaps it wouldn't be such a good idea after all. The dances brought the "flesh trains" and the flesh trains often brought London's gutter to their base. But waving away his preconception of the worst that could happen, Ike stuck a pipe in his mouth and stepped outside and pushed off in the general direction of Claire's place.

Ike hadn't really thought much about Claire for some time. No, he'd not thought a great deal about her until the announcement over the Tannoy. Seemingly she had voluntarily walked back into his thinking. Through no fault of his, of course. Now he was knocking at the old grey door once more. "For what?" he thought, then recapturing his

senses he prepared to sell Claire on going to the dance with him.

Claire was out, the servant said. She wasn't far away. They expected her back in a quarter of an hour or so. Would he wait? Of course he would wait. Why the hell did they think he had come all the way over here, anyway? Certainly not to see them. Of course he would wait.

Those fifteen minutes passed unbearably slowly. As the minutes disappeared into the close past, Ike walked back and forth as if he were only ten minutes away from an operating table and he was to perform a brain operation. But he could handle brains. They were easy. Even now people were beginning to remark about his Capsule Kid. Dave's case in the medical world was attracting plenty of attention. Too much, perhaps.

A general was already trying to get nasty about his treating Dave off the base grounds. Then he guessed the general couldn't stand up under the impact of his success. Jealous. He hated jealous people. But then his mind hitched over that statement. He was almost jealous of his capsule kid, who had seen Claire several times lately, and Stevie had taken her Sunday-walking. He refined his definition of hate so as to exclude hating Stevie. As for Dave, well, he'd show Dave he wasn't too old to best out a mere youngster. And what was more, he'd show him that if Claire was good enough for Dave, he could have her too. He was a professional, a highly educated guy—he had more to offer. He

could talk about anything, almost. Bones, fractures, brains, and dozens of things. He knew a few words of French, and a lot of Latin. He looked back at those words and felt a simultaneous hatred, not for Dave or Stevie, but for himself. He hated the thought that he didn't know more about life in general. He should speak more languages, know more about poets, bards and all that sort of people. Now he was vexed. Vexed by an ignorance of a world outside the simple thinking of specialising in one line, like medicine.

Then Ike thanked God for Claire. She rushed into the room and drove out his "pity" thoughts. They talked and he talked. She was charming. She agreed to everything just the way she was supposed to. How nice she was. Ike was very happy.

But into his subdivided world came trouble. The Capsule Kid had also heard the dance being announced over the Tannoy and had come along to pay his respects to Claire, and to ask her to go to the dance with him.

Dave's arrival was most disconcerting to Ike. Dave kidded him. He called him an oldster and a couple of insulting things. It was like a son calling a father foul names. It wasn't fun. But Claire petted Ike's pride with tender words and reiterated that she was going to the dance with him.

Dave didn't mind much. Women are women. He'd see what the flesh train had to offer. Perhaps he'd draw the kind they reach up in a tree for. One that can hardly talk !

On the main runway, barely a stone's throw from the tree clump alongside Claire's house, engines by the fours were drumming up noise and wind, warming up. A light rain was falling. But the engines roared through the rain. This was the lovely June! But this was only part of the story. For from this green field with its black criss-crossed landing strips men went out each day. And each day some didn't come back.

As Dave walked back to the base he skirted the field. Whose were the flowers? Those little yellow and white flowers? Were they the flyer's flowers? Were the flowers for the dead who have no graves, who have no funerals? Yes, these were an English June's contribution. There were no wreaths but there definitely were flowers. Lots of them covered the whole field.

It was funny to Dave, but he'd been learning. He seemed to take to new ideas more easily. It was like living in a glass house with no obstructions to view. He saw as he never had seen before. For instance he never saw little flowers before. Was he just growing up? Ike was old and so were lots of other guys. Why didn't they see the flowers? He thought, maybe growing up doesn't come with years as much as with the doing of new things.

Nobody trusted Dave as they had before. Dave pondered. Before what? Well he had been tired and perhaps gone haywire. But one thing he noticed and that was he was tired of old things, he wanted new things. He didn't really want in the way he

had always wanted before. Wanting can be an awful consuming desire. But that part of it had long since passed away. What he wanted, he did less violently with a feeling just expressed, denuded of passion.

In front of Dave there was definite evidence of a new world. To get there he was accepting the Air Forces routine. But while accepting the routine he was looking for the promised land in the other things that he had never noticed before—maybe that's how he came to notice the flowers that grew in an unkempt field—the only flowers a flyer ever gets.

CHAPTER XVIII

MUSIC not in keeping with a manure-conscious English countryside echoed in every direction. It was dance night at the officers' club, and it was also the 4th of July without the courtesy of those oldtime firecrackers. Everybody got dressed up. Some guys even polished their shoes. Gals arrived at the base in bunches and mobs, in "love buses" in convoys, for this was the flesh train. But for Stevie, Ike and Dave the whole affair was much more like a private party. Claire was the sole subject of their attentions, the sole feminine allure they recognized as their "party."

The club was spotted and wreathed with oddments of flowers and greenery. The onetime eloquent nude paintings on the walls were half hidden behind "decency drapes." It was just as if anybody who came to an Air Forces dance could be insulted by the sight of a nude.

Early in the evening the GI band started grinding out the jive, and there was much corner talk.

Stevie was playing a lonely game—a waiting, observing game for Claire's attentions. He like Ike, and perhaps even Dave, thought of his' personal wants for the first time in a long time. While Dave and Ike danced with Claire, he was only called upon to be middle man in a cutting-in routine which periodically allowed the privilege of saying "It's me again."

Stevie's thoughts tried to find exercise. He thought, for instance, about the Negroes who came to England from America without their women. This was done for political reasons, the papers said. Whose political reason? What purpose? Stevie supposed Congress and the church-goers back home presumed that the old nigger was an animal you could fence up and forget. But it hadn't worked out that way over here. Everybody knew that. One coloured boy from a service unit that did airfield construction work, walked from village to village in search of a darkie girl. He walked all the way to London. But he found only white women. When the MPs. caught him and brought him back again, his only defense was he had wanted a woman. The CO refused to give the boy "the rails." There was flavoured understanding—understanding flavoured with humaneness that even the worst of COs can't afford to forget.

Stevie turned and sifted corner-talk. News, local style, was pouring forth in an argumentative stream from many mouths. For example, a general from division headquarters went along as a passenger on the day's mission. The mission was to Germany. The general was the bossy kind—you know, talked so much that the pilot could hardly take time off to operate his aircraft. So the lieutenant pilot thought up a neat remedy. He said he had reached back when the general wasn't looking and cut off his oxygen. A couple of minutes later the general dropped into sleep. It was only on the way home that the general was allowed to wake up. Everybody

agreed it served generals right for talking so damned much.

The best news of the week was that the United States was going to resume the whiskey output. How the guys wanted to get back to rye and bourbon ! They feared going back to anything else. Anything else would certainly be different. At least it would seem different. Interim-dreaming would pedestalize anybody or anything, and they just knew there would be disappointments. Maybe *they* would be a part of the disappointments. Stevie had said himself that it was the hams that made the heroes. But regardless whether it would be on the home-side or their side, the disappointments would be hard to take.

The mission had caused more than a little disgust. Some bombs dropped short of the target and landed in the middle of a Nazi dairy farm. The CO got really mad. He collected the squadron commanders together and said, " What in the Goddam hell do your guys think we're doing ? We're not just dropping these bloody bombs to curdle the German milk supply."

In good old Air Forces lingo, such an exposition of the fine art of missing targets is known as flub-dubbing around. Despite the communiques, there was more than one guy who had been a flub-dubber. Even some of the bombardiers who were dropping their bombs on the pattern of lead crew, became flub-dubbers. No wonder the flub-dubbers came back to the club lounge to read the newspapers to find out what happened.

Stevie listened to the chaplain, who apparently was trying to out-talk a sinner from sinning. But no such luck. As Stevie moved closer he recognized that sinning was not even the remote subject of conversation. The chaplain was up to his old tricks. He was trying to wangle something. The chaplain admitted he always tried wangling first. If that failed, then he'd get down to praying. Praying seemed to be a last resort for the chaplain, who certainly was a most efficient wangler.

Stevie went from group to group around the edge of the dance floor. Sounds came into mind and out again. Distantly Stevie heard questions. Why hadn't they decorated the GI who had discovered that the packing cases they shipped the bombs to England in made a good substitute for coal? The decorations were so routine—and moreover, fuel for stoves was really important. Summer wasn't summer over here. In fact, a lot of days were very cold. You had to scrounge, beg, borrow or steal firewood or anything that would burn, and bomb cases made the hottest fires. The only strange thing about the bomb cases was the Gawd-awful racket they made. Burning straight gunpowder with all its accompanying roars and thunderings never made any more noise. But the fires were warm, and even Wa-Wa looked approvingly at the bomb-case blazes. They held up his "cherry red" reputation for fire-making.

Even the "shack hut" was kept warm by a bomb-case fire. The shack hut was a privately used shed at the edge of the woods beyond the camp. The

boys had appropriated it for ladying. It was an especially handy thing to have to hibernate in on dance nights.

But getting a woman over to the shack hut was not really important to Stevie. He just wanted to marry Claire. He didn't want to try shacking up with her.

No, he wanted her and, simply put, that was that. Claire could improve his life. Probably she would add the foreign touch, dignity and certain undeniable comforts. It would be an easier post-war existence with her.

But the background provided by dreams of Claire quickly disappeared. Pappy Adams and some of the boys came in, grabbed the melancholy Stevie and swung him over to the bar. Pappy bought drinks. Fritz, Coots, who had for some time transferred to another outfit, and George agreed it was an excellent idea for Pappy to shell out pounds and buy drinks. Only Joe came to the bar reluctantly.

When the drinks were handed out Joe led a migration of the B.O.Q. dash 201 old gang over to a corner of the bar.

"Well Gents," he said. "This is goodbye."

"What's up Joe?" Pappy was as shocked as anyone else, but he never let you know it, not in words. His question sounded dispassionate, but he really wasn't.

"Nothing much," Joe returned, fumbling and fingering for proper sentences. "Nothing much, Pappy, but it's time for me to go to Italy—it's July and July is my month."

The boys drank to Joe—they started to sing “That Old Gang of Mine,” until even Stevie couldn’t stand being that theatrical and shouted at the top of his lungs.

“Oh for God’s sake, quit it. We’ll be meeting up with Joe soon enough.”

“That’s right, Stevie,” said Joe. “They’ll probably send you guys out to China, and if they do, the first stop will perhaps be Italy.”

“If anybody’s buying drinks, they might include us,” said Wheats. “Us” included the new Red Cross girl who had taken Marianne’s place. Her name was Margaret Walker, and Margaret came from a small town in Pennsylvania. She had bicycled all over Europe the year before the war. Since she arrived at the base she had spent most of her two months selling the GIs on the idea that you could really eat French cooking. When she wasn’t with the GIs she was being followed by Wheats, who always did take a shining to new material. As far as being “material” for Wheats, Margaret wasn’t exactly the kind of girl who would be material for anybody or anything, unless she knew it was right. She liked her job. Moreover Margaret got along with Claire. Getting along with Claire had lately become one of the qualifications for membership in Stevie and Ike’s gang.

This time Joe bought the drinks, and Stevie and Pappy picked up the conversation.

“This is a fine Fourth of July party,” said Pappy.

“What’s wrong now, Pappy?”

"Well, Stevie, you see that sign over there?"

"Yes."

"Well, in twenty minutes I'll bet you a month's wages they'll turn it upside down and we'll be alerted for a mission tomorrow. That means they're going to clear everybody out of here except ground officers. You guys will have all the women."

The sign was made of a small piece of cardboard and had very important words written on it. You could tell that the sign had not been ordered by flying personnel, because right side up it read: "At ease," and turned the other way round it read: "Alerted for mission."

It wasn't five minutes later than the telephone rang behind the bar. The GI bartender stopped serving drinks and, somewhat peeved at the disturbance, answered the phone. No sooner had he laid the phone down than he picked up the cardboard and turned it so that it read "Alerted for mission."

It was not the first time that orders for a mission had arrived so late. But seldom had there been a party already in progress. Even Fritz, who spurned the idea of superstition, turned to Pappy and confessed:

"I don't like the smell of it. Every time we've had a late mission we've had trouble."

Fritz downed his drink, then left. But George wandered about trying to get some information. Pappy reached across the bar and tried to call Operations. He was trying to find out what was up when Dave and Claire trailed by. Joe wandered into the

bar. T.G. tagged along to add his little bit to the confusion. T.G. said he had Joe's orders to leave for London at once. But more confusing to T.G. than the late mission was the fact that he was being transferred to Italy, too. It surely looked as if B.O.Q. dash 201 was going to be a lonely place.

Three rounds of drinks were stacked on the bar. The last round had been bought by Ike who was more than satisfied with the removal of T.G. who did not fit in at all well with his scheme. T.G. had been one of Claire's lesser loves, but each reduction of the competition was momentarily gratifying to Ike.

Something happened to the party as the flying personnel began slipping out under the cover of rueful feminine glances. For a minute it was like the flickering burn of an ice-cold needle shower. The flesh-train girls didn't know whether to curse or go blind ; all that lovely manpower was unceremoniously slipping away. The steadier women from the neighbourhood gulped a little, then smiled, showing themselves off advantageously in front of the flimsy city breed. They knew their men might not come back ; but that was becoming an old story. The bare fact of death had lost much of its horror ; but that awful uncertainty was something else again. Not to know. That was one of the worst prices of this costliest of all wars.

Then the ground officers rallied to get the ball rolling again. The music became strident and hectic. The fun must go on. Did go on. But it was material and mono-purposed. Some of the girls were more

than a little tipsy, they were easy marks. And some of the men seemed determined to get just plain drunk and take whatever came their way, just to reach out and grab.

Claire felt an inexplicable fear gnawing at her heart. Her face was white and a little strained. She hated tasteless, colourless materialism. This was an uncomplimentary state of affairs to precede what might be the end for men or the making of heroism.

"What's the matter, honey?" Ike asked in a calm, level voice.

"I don't know," she told him. "I think I'd better get out of here, quick. I think you Americans have a word for the way I feel. Hunch, isn't it? Something pretty awful is going to happen. I can feel it. Really, I can. And this silly noise makes it all seem too ghastly. Can't we get some air? Please?"

"Why, of course we can," Ike said reassuringly. "Would you like me to take you home?"

"No, I don't think so; I'd just lie and think, and thinking isn't what I need just now."

"Say," Ike had an inspiration, "you've never really seen us get ready for a mission, have you, Claire?"

"No; I always understood outsiders weren't permitted."

"Well, they really aren't; but I think we can smuggle you in close enough to get an idea of what goes on. It's quite a sight. And this one came up so suddenly I imagine the boys will be working so hard and fast that nobody'll notice us."

The long English July dusk was thickening as they strolled out to the perimeter track. It was nearing midnight. Three squadrons of Liberators crouched on the dispersal areas, seeming to glare toward Naziland with a baleful sightlessness. They looked like spare, gaunt giants. Fleshless but muscled. It was they who were to hurl deadly assault across the Channel or the North Sea and carry destruction to an enemy.

"How can anything look so lovely and hideous at the same time, Ike?" Claire breathed. And he knew what she meant. Somehow, they were closer than ever before. It was that adhesive quality of awe that gives spectacles grandeur and importance.

Young men, faceless in the gathering darkness, were swarming everywhere. Mechanics and engineers were over, under, on and in each of the planes being readied for flight.

"Those boys have an awful responsibility," Ike told Claire. "There are so damned many things that can go wrong with an aircraft. The kids in the ground crews try like the devil to foresee as much as their imagination will allow them. They probably are the most careful workmen in the world. And even so, things still happen. Little things, but they usually cost lives. Yes, the kids are careful, all right. I don't see how they keep from cracking under the strain; but if you told one of them that, he'd think you were crazy. Some do. But youth makes relaxation easier. It must be wonderful to be that

young. I guess I was, once, but I can't seem to remember it very well."

Behind them there came the chugging of a diesel engine, and the clatter of wheels. Ike drew Claire aside, and past them rumbled something looking like a mechanical centipede. A tractor was delivering a train of bombs to one of the Libs.

"Looks like 500-pounders this trip," Ike commented, showing Claire the squat, tubular casks, each on its own little carriage for safety in transporting and loading.

"What would happen if they dropped one by accident here?" Claire wanted to know.

"Nothing much. Or at least that's the theory. You see, bombs have to be fused before they're effective. That means, simply, that each bomb has a detonator which must be activated before there can be an explosion caused by impact. Of course, fire's something else. You know, the whole thing's pretty ingenious, at that. The bombardier can fuse his bombs by remote control from the nose of the planes. Don't ask me how, for I couldn't explain if I knew. Anyhow, that saves having to fly and taxi around for hours with 'live' bombs in the bomb bay."

After the tractors, came gasoline trucks with their long flexing hoses. Some of the planes that had been gassed up first were being warmed up by engineers and crew chiefs. Summer was working a strange routine of life. It was just before midnight and yet it was only partially dark. Blackout time was after eleven. In a few hours it would be light

again and during those few hours the boys would be expected to get a full night's rest. At three o'clock there would be a hot breakfast. Fruit juice, cereal, eggs, ham, potatoes and gallons of coffee.

Ike and Claire walked past the control tower, past the hangars over towards B.O.Q. dash 201. Ike walked slightly ahead, apparently aimlessly, but in reality gently leading the steps that took them far beyond B.O.Q. dash 201 and on to the shack hut, near the woods.

The shack hut was an ordinary shed just outside the camp. But it had a reputation that completely bore out the reason of its name. It stood guiltlessly beyond the edge of the camp, with a human appearance expressing child wonderment.

A rough exterior might have been misleading unless you knew how many pounds the boys of B.O.Q. dash 201 had spent collaring odd chairs, sofas, tables, and more paraphernalia, to make their private cottage more than just comfortable. Pin-up girls were plastered on an upturned engine case that served admirably as a bar. Besides the bar the most noticeable piece of furniture was an over-sized double bed that Stevie had bought at a "bombed-out" sale in London.

The custom-made bed was the centre of comment as well as social activity. But more than this, the bed was outstanding in its setting and decorations. The decorations consisted of two placards tacked to the head-board. On either side a placard pointed out significant facts in the life of a Yank in England,

one read "3091 miles to New York" and the other "This way to the lavatory and air-raid shelter."

Surveying the shack hut Claire smiled and accepted a meticulously mixed potion with her tongue in her cheek. She had always heard that Americans invited seduction by mixing unchartered concoctions that served as pavement for anything. It wasn't that she minded particularly. She didn't feel confounded or disturbed by any of these thoughts. In a way it was the happenings of the evening, with its contrast between the women of the flesh train, the boys, the officers' club, the probability of a mission, and a number of other conflicting emotions.

There were two major evidences of reasons why Ike appealed to her so much. Perhaps living so close to the base, since its conception, Claire had developed a complex against letting herself drift towards too much naturalness in the presence of so many youths. Ike had amply exhibited his feelings, without those typical hashed trite words about love, life, and the hereafter. Ike was no youth. For this reason it made it easier for her to fit in with the circumstances of the shack hut without the involvement of having to say anything about anything or promise to be a good girl for the rest of her life!

But despite his good points Ike was terribly nervy us, and from restlessness, paced from the bar to the settee—from the settee back to the bar. He watched the clock. He talked about the boys and Dave. How sorry he was that Joe and T.G. were having to leave. He guessed Italy would soon be normal

again. In the rush of Joe and T.G's. leaving he regretted they had not had a real going-away party. Ike was obviously unable to find the words he wanted to use. It wasn't that he didn't know the right words. It was more that he was, for the first time in years, abnormally inhibited.

Since the December days when Ike and Dave had come to Claire's house he had certainly changed. In those days Claire felt there would have been no hesitancy in his manner or even in his general design for living. There was no doubt that Ike was unhappy. He expressed this unhappiness in everything he did. Claire even felt that perhaps he was getting tired of the role of being father confessor and big medicine man. There were so many boys who required more than normal treatment, and so much of Ike's time. It was only on the rare occasions that he had ten minutes of free time that he might call his own.

Now between midnight and an early dawn he was wanting to use the minutes but instead he was squandering time as a play boy might. Plainly Ike needed the affection Claire felt she wanted to bestow. But bestowing affection on Ike was most difficult. He wanted everything with guarantee. He didn't say so, but that was obviously in his mind. He was apparently jealous of both Dave and Stevie. For what even Claire couldn't determine.

Ike obviously wanted the guarantee that Claire would be his war-time English wife, wholesome, faithful and uncomplaining—uncomplaining in the fact that any day she would be a war-time husbandless

girl who would have to start all over again. Ike would reappear in America as "not a bit different," devoted to an ever-loving wife. Perhaps the futility of such reasoning made his pacing heavier and the drinks stronger.

Claire began to be amused by their situation, as she progressed in the drinking of Ike's fully-fashioned cocktail. Her amusement by his desperation served to help her cast aside logic and prediction. Ike's impatience had almost disappeared and he was feeling the effects of self-contempt for having brought Claire to their shack hut under the influence of physical reasoning. But from her side, came a subconscious stimulus for him to move closer. It was not just to move closer to hold hands ; because Claire had really conditioned herself to be desired. Ike was somebody she could have without lowering ideals, without accepting intimidating sexual responsibilities, or inflicting on herself the rigors of an irritating conscience. He had given something to society, he was a doctor, he was clean, he was fairly good-looking, and what's more he would go home, or go away somewhere, in the not too far distant future. And too, she could always say, "Let's just be friends."

Ike seemed to refuse mentally to recognize the position into which he had forced Claire and himself. Not many times in his life had he done this. There were many times that he had oversold himself on an idea and then dropped it from sheer monotony. But this time he had everything he desired, without a struggle, or without knowing it. But there was no

perception, no awareness from Ike's side of what was going on inside Claire's mind. The mind chemist was losing his sharpness, his touch, as he continued on using wrong, silly, useless words, and completely missing little gestures that Claire was offering as engraved invitations.

As the time before briefing shortened Claire became more and more restless. As if waking from a dream she listened to her own voice saying, "Ike, we should never have come here." Then after pausing, "It hasn't been fair to either of us." Now at this very second she knew clearly, for the first time, that it was not Ike she wanted, no not ever.

Ike remained silent, steadying his eyes on the drink in his hand. Her's rested on him and her thoughts hit the ground like ripe fruit. Yes, she followed Ike to the Shack Hut knowing full well what it entailed. For months she felt their growing affection would some day force an outlet. Tension between them recently convinced her of his jealousy and unhappiness.

Maybe the hungering look in his eyes tonight appealed to her, maybe she was curious to taste the sensation of his arms around her. Maybe their unexpressed, unspoken desires maturing for these many months working with time towards the climax, now staled and became lifeless in the effort. Something went wrong when they faced each other here, now alone in the situation of their own design and wanting. The minutes passed but with the minutes passed away enthusiasm as it faded into empty, purposeless, embarrassment.

Claire shifted uneasily and gulped down the dregs of her drink with the gesture of a final act. But before she could get to her feet Ike laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Wait a minute."

His voice sounded gentle enough, though it might be the last strangled sound of male pride.

"What's the hurry?"

He tried to conjure up ideas to recapture his position. He was like a man lost.

"No hurry, I only thought the others might worry. Perhaps Stevie——." Ending off in the midst of words, Claire couldn't stand another minute in that hut. It had come over her all in a few seconds. She could see Stevie's face watching over her as always. He, Stevie, was her man.

"Ike let's get out of here. Let's walk, let's breathe fresh air." Claire got up and headed for the door.

"And start a new day—for what?" Ike stared after Claire, then his lips twisted in an ironical smile. He rose, shrugging his shoulders, mumbling. He followed Claire outside.

CHAPTER XIX

THE briefings were held in one of the largest buildings on the base. The building might have been easily mistaken for an aircraft hangar. It was rectangular in shape and squared off at the corners. But this yellow tabernacle of folding chairs, over-heated and stuffy, was definitely no lady's parlour or aircraft display salon. The boys' beards were out—their hats were on. Several hundred officers were attempting to make themselves comfortable sitting on latticed wooden chairs. Leather-jacketed, and covered with ingenious colourful caricatures of squadron significance, the boys sat back anticipating the usual hour-long briefing.

Outside a persistent rain played dull music. Inside there was little outward expression of excitement. One voice began. An anonymous lieutenant was giving out instructions. "Stations at such and such a time . . . Taxi . . . take-off so many hundred hours . . . Assembly altitude . . . Reference altitude..."

A second lieutenant came onto the platform addressing those sleepy officers, "Temperature at cruising altitude . . . Temperature at bombing altitude. . ."

Then a captain, a Southerner with wings up, began to temper the briefing with more seriousness. The audience began to wake as he raised his voice and drone his story through cigarette clouds. The target was Big B—Berlin. He was shouting. "The axis

of attack would be on such and such an angle . . . bomb load . . . hours on oxygen . . . speed . . . climb . . . cruise . . . descent . . . ”

A huge map of Europe covered the entire wall behind the slightly raised platform from which the day's instructions were being given. Plastered over the map were great pieces of celluloid. Painted on the celluloid were diagrams of the bomb run—routes to the target and return. The routes were designated by black strips—the danger areas where German flak was concentrated were, of course, in red.

B day needed little explanation to this Liberator group. They knew Berlin. They knew the flak there. They had seen it too many times already.

“How many guns are they supposed to have *now* defending Berlin ? ”

“Too many,” came one answer.

“Looks like the bomb run will be down wind.”

“Yes.”

“Nice straight route home,” someone else said.

“What about the weather ? ”

Then the weather man outlined a blue, clearing sky. Everybody agreed the weather man was O.K. when he provided a visible target. There were picture lanterns showing slides of their target on a white curtain that came from a roller off the top of the map.

After the pictures, the executive officer called the roll. He read out the day's assignments: D for Dog . . . B for Baker . . . G for George . . . D for Donald . . . O for Obo . . . Q for Queen . . . C for

Bar . . . S for Sugar . . . and so on for some minutes the Liberators received their designations, their destinies.

The Colonel took over the briefing. He asked for any questions. But there were none. He hesitated. He walked down to his seat. Perhaps the boys were dangerously inattentive. The absence of questions disturbed the Colonel for he marched back onto the platform and demanded that they take another good look at the target. It wasn't like hitting oil wells, he explained meticulously. There would be no pretty fires. Moreover they could expect fighters. Lots of fighters.

The route into Germany was not their usual one. The lead ships would have a real job. They were going in through a corridor across Belgium sneaking into Germany just north of those Cologne guns. He pointed out to Pappy Adams that he would have a great responsibility to see that their group at the head of the parade to Naziland made no mistakes. Pappy had been posted as leader for the day and this day was their group's chance for history-making, he said. Pappy was not so worried about making ordinary mistakes. He had been milled through the worst the Nazis had to offer. As for his navigation, George would plot and navigate from minute to minute all the way there and home again. There was no worry there. He wasn't too happy to have the Colonel riding in Dave's place alongside him. But that was part of the racket of being a lead ship. The crew got

a big kick out of it, so he guessed the extra responsibility was worth it.

The Colonel was talking on, "There's a strong man in the back of every Liberator, every heavy bomber. It's up to you men to encourage that man before you take off to-day. He's responsible for your men's morale—your crew's safety, as much as you are."

The Colonel finished his admonitions and returned to his seat. The adjutant called for a time check. He counted seconds until all the navigators were okayed out.

Pappy knew his boys were "strong." They had come a long way. They would do a good job. He wouldn't have to talk to *his* crew or scold the hell outta them like he'd done when they first came over. They were a top crew now. It was a real honor to lead the whole 8th Air Force. But being lead ship meant more than just great honors. He would have to change his personnel about. Dave would have to take over Cohen's job as tail-gunner so an officer could keep watch over the formation following astern. Cohen might have to be left home. This seemed very wrong. After all his work. And too he'd have to finish up his last mission with some other crew. No, he'd take 'Muscles' along. He could ride up between the Colonel and himself.

This would be Pappy's final mission. Now finally, at last, he was almost on that transport plane headed home to see those fine twins of his.

Pappy wondered what had happened to Ike. It was only on rarest occasions that old Ike missed

briefings. Generally he sat in the front row and jotted down crew names and all sorts of details. He kept a small notebook in his breast pocket. Then he'd pack up his notebook after briefings, he'd run around getting guys fixed up with all sorts of things they needed badly and no one else would ever bother about.

Pappy saw Stevie standing at the back of the briefing room with the chaplain. He walked over and asked if either of them had seen Ike.

"Nobody's seen Ike since Claire and he went out and left that dance last night," Stevie answered.

"I saw them after the dance," the chaplain contributed apologetically. "They walked over past the Control Tower just about midnight."

"Well, if either of you see him," Pappy continued, "Please tell him I'm looking for him. I want to get a Red Cross kit for Flak Alley."

Pappy disappeared back into the briefing room, Stevie and the Chaplain walked over to the adjoining hut where there was a pail of hot black coffee. Dave was trying to sober up and had downed several cups already. The three began cursing the rain, the early hour, and then they turned, almost as one in motion, to watch Ike and Claire as they crossed the room. They had come for coffee too.

But as Claire felt a hundred searching inditing eyes on her she strained for Stevie's glance. Here she saw a joyous welcome. Her face reddened in natural reaction of her heart's recognition.

The atmospheric disturbance caused by the entrance

of these two people made Stevie's eyes travel around like pin-wheels—first he looked at Claire, at Ike, Dave, and then the chaplain. The chaplain could not and did not understand what was going on. But these matters did not concern the chaplain. But they did concern Dave and Stevie.

Dave and Stevie had completely different reasons for trying to figure out Claire's four a.m. appearance.

Stevie saw Claire and Ike leave the officers' club. But he had never discontinued watching over Claire. He had watched her, studied her, since way back last autumn. He hadn't wanted to follow them from the dance a few hours before. At least he didn't think that could be construed as good taste. Within himself he could have been persuaded to have followed, spied on them. To have stopped them would have accomplished no purpose except to paint him as a fool. He could have followed, claiming that he was just joking—but that was a thing Stevie could never do.

His correspondence school legal mind pointed out that he still had no rights, or claims on Claire. He felt forced to action because he knew that if he ever wanted her to be *his*, she was approaching one of those important cross-roads of life where he must sway her, turn her towards him.

Claire and Ike's abrupt disappearance of the night before had made Stevie good and mad. But, queerly, when Claire and Ike entered the coffee hut all his madness vanished. Stevie sensed something more demanding than his own inclination to be mad.

It wasn't so much their going off together that was really responsible for Stevie's being upset. It was more that uncertainty of what is happening, or going to happen, or should happen, or has happened that makes educated people like Stevie angry. Perhaps this was a hangover characteristic from his stock market days.

As Stevie offered coffee and graciousness he made up his mind to ask Claire to marry him. He would ask her very soon. In fact he would ask her as soon as he had the first opportunity.

Dave, on the other hand, drank more coffee and stuffed himself with more aspirin tablets. He was simply indignant over Ike's getting a hold on Claire. He was nursing a crude vanity. Dave liked to poke fun at Ike. Not that he was unfriendly. It was because he was becoming more coarse. Dave certainly was not by nature coarse; but he had become casual, terribly casual, and casualness often appears as coarseness.

"Been out night clubbing, Ike?" Dave shot out sarcastically. Ike ignored the question which was more a comment than a question. Any Goddams could not have helped. Dave continued trying to force an argument.

"I suppose you two have been meeting and mangling in the bushes. Pleasant pastime they tell me."

Pappy came up as Ike could have very easily, without prejudice, let Dave have a good square right fist in the jaw. But the remark was shelved:

Pappy skipped stressing the social and private lives of Nissen hut B.O.Q. dash 201 as they passed in front of him. Pappy didn't sense this intramural quarrel, for his cares were mainly for his crew, the briefing, the mission, and he shut himself off mentally from any possibility of confusion. Pappy's wife had an influence in this one of his many characters. She had schooled him so rigidly in living-making that he possessed no desire for meddling.

Pappy's boys and most of the crowd from B.O.Q. dash 201 had gathered near the coffee pail. George, with his more fashionably controlled nerves, seemed to take the mission in his stride as Pappy did. Since that fateful day George parachuted out of Flak Alley number 1, he'd grown cooler in action and become closer to Pappy, acquiring many of his qualities.

From a dance that furnished discordant music, hooch and "dream" girls, George settled quickly into the job of organising his world of figures into harmonious sequence. In lesser or greater degree it was this ability to concentrate on an assignment that makes flyers graduate from rank to rank.

You could almost see the bottom of the coffee pail when Pappy and his kids said, "See you later, folks," and ambled out to try to get transportation to their Liberator. Dave delayed longest. Ike, who had only to go over to the control tower, not far from the coffee hut, followed him.

Left behind in the vacated hut were Stevie and Claire. Somehow it seemed that the important things in their lives were dissolving right in front of them.

Even hard cold facts were not facts anymore. The three felt empty in the very particular sense of that word. Inside the hut there seemed to exist a vacuum, but that vacuum was a very personal vacuum, and existed even between Claire and Stevie. Joe had gone away. T.G. had gone too. Coots, whom Stevie had taught to play a decent game of bridge, had been transferred to another group.

What was happening to Claire? She fidgeted and twisted herself about, consciously straightening, pulling back her shoulders as if she wished to face some mythical challenge.

Claire was being brought back to the thinking of those thoughts of reality—of family, of friends, of close kin. Here, she was wrapped in an atmosphere of the Nissen hut. She was reconstructing what might have been the scene on the night before her brother didn't return from Berlin. The Americans were preparing to go off on a daylight mission, but she felt the scene must have been much the same on her brother's R.A.F. base also "Somewhere in England."

"Somewhere in England" had always sounded romantic. It stirred her imagination like the sight of a "secret" postmark. She wanted to become a part of this "somewhere."

How could she help? What could she do? What could a woman do who wasn't even supposed to be around there? Anyway Claire presumed that anything she did would be far too feminine.

The surroundings were so metallic, so mechanical,

so modern, that she scarcely felt that she as a woman had a place here. Yet she was on the same soil where her family had lived, and had died for so many generations. She thought back over those quick years while she was growing up. The years sailed by in even mental procession without stumblings, or forgettings, or regrettings.

And then Claire felt the feeling of family—that strongest feeling a woman can know. She knew she had a stomach, a heart, a head, feet and eyes, all her facilities. She was haughty in the magnificence of that feeling. Then her eyes were lifted up, and she looked into Stevie's. There was no mistaking this feeling. Here was her family. Stevie would head a family that should and would be hers.

Looking away from him to breathe fresh thoughts she took Stevie's arm. They walked around the large room. The trail of her thoughts pursued Claire again. This was the first time she had consciously been seeing things so clearly.

Unconsciously she had been seeing things in their changing moods for some time. She had gone to Ike and invited him to her. Now she was contrasting sex with a new urge to help a male humanity that adorned this base. But even she, as a female, could not fathom her complex soul, nor go camping with it, for it was the soul of a woman. She knew, she too, was growing up.

Claire came back to the cruel practical side of her life. She was surely determined not to scatter herself, or waste her efforts. As she was defining

purposes one thing stood unconquered. That was Stevie's silence. Stevie's silence, bracketed with such mortal understanding weighed heavily upon her. What could he be thinking when he looked at her as he did? Was he accusing her? She was not embarrassed by what she had done. Only weak women abuse feminine privileges and get embarrassed. They are the impractical women.

In Stevie Claire saw the man, the one man, with whom she could go along. She could go along with him for unlimited time.

She felt a relief that she had left no memories in the Shack Hut.

Stevie was not insensitive. He knew Claire was working out something in her own mind. Just the route she was taking, or how she was accomplishing all this, he could obviously not know. However, her face was pained, confused.

The dull music of the rain had ended. There were beginning to be signs of daylight. The grey clouds were dropping off the horizon as narrowly drawn sun streaks were pinioning the sky with cylinders of light. The daylight was coming closer to them. Instinctively Stevie began to talk to Claire—to tell her of family, of marriage, of them.

Dawn, daylight and darkness. With the daylight the faces of the crewmen were expressive with many different ambitions. But as between the couple that strode along the perimeter—apart—but united there was only one ambition. This couple was going into the daylight—walking into it—living into it. But

the crews were flying into a possible, a probable darkness. They would not see any positive daylight until they ceased to be air crews, or met some place else but England.

Dozens upon dozens of roaring engines swept the night rain off the runways, roared defiantly and boisterously, and sent out the unnatural challenge of their man-made power to the elements. It was as if the aircraft themselves in a supreme act of boldness were shouting, " To hell with hell ! "

CHAPTER XX

ONCE airborne Pappy checked up on his men. As they reached 12,000 feet he recommended that everyone go onto oxygen. Then he called back to Dave.

"Pilot to tail-gunner. How are you doin' back there, Dave, Over."

"Tail-gunner to pilot. Doin' just fine. Two more groups have joined us. Formation's still pretty loose though. Will keep you posted every three or four minutes. Over."

"Rah-jer." Pappy went on from man to man to see everyone was Okay.

For almost two hours the ship circled monotonously, gathering altitude as the formation was stacked into proper order. They cruised from north England to south England—from Wales nearly to the Channel. They kept time with England's milkmen—they woke others from the night's sleep—the vibration of their motors penetrated from ceiling to cellar, from Oxford to Westminster.

It might have been a warm, July day, muggy and stifling, down on the ground, but as they pushed into the sub-stratosphere it was cold and stimulating. It was not nearly as cold as back in December, but certainly cold enough to make icebergs wholesale.

About the time normal people were breakfast-eating, the Colonel's formation, with Pappy's Flak Alley number 2 at the lead, moved toward their fighter rendezvous point, a few miles off the British coast.

As the seconds came from the master-clock on the instrument panel the long parade to Naziland converged over a tiny black spot on George's map.

They crossed over the top of a large coastal convoy, that sluggishly crept northward beneath them. They drove into several cloud banks—white cloud banks that with snow fluffiness seemed to wash and wipe the wings of their ship clean for action.

Off towards the north-east a thin grey line defined a horizon, on which was superimposed the coast-line of Belgium.

Eerie in its distant earthiness, Belgium with its lakes and small industrial cloud spirals seemed almost insignificant. As they passed over that coastline Fritz saw ack ack firing and bursting far below their altitude. He noised the interphone.

"Bombardier to Colonel. Looks like they don't know how to shoot any more. Flak's about a thousand feet short. Over."

But before the Colonel could answer Fritz, Bicarb called in.

"Waist gunner to pilot. Say Pappy, enemy fighter about ten miles straight off my wing, evidently pacing us over the flak. He's flying our altitude."

"Rah-jer."

"Pilot to Colonel. What do you want to do about it, colonel? Shall we direct the fighter escort over us to chase off enemy fighters?"

"Colonel to pilot. No. He's too far off. Can't waste time. Probably better just let 'em know, though."

"Bombardier to pilot. Flak climbing up closer. One burst few hundred feet low."

"Ball turret to pilot. Flak calibration moving left to right. Repeat. Left to right. They're still short. Over."

The next flak bursts were ahead of Flak Alley. A great piece crashed through the cowlings of the Liberator, going into the Colonel's shoulder, entering between his arm-pit and chest. But the force of the flak was so terrific it shot on through the Colonel's shoulder and into Muscles Cohen, killing him instantly. Muscles was standing between Pappy and the Colonel.

But the flak went on. It bounced off the armour plate behind Cohen's head and down onto Pappy Adams. The flak went through his shoulder blade, and he probably never knew what hit him.

Flak Alley lurched as Pappy was knocked forward against the controls. The Colonel, swinging from consciousness to unconsciousness, slipped his arm around the wheel, as he fell forward, hugging the controls, trying to keep the ship level.

Dave, at his tail guns, was trying to call on the interphone.

"Tail gunner to pilot."

"Tail gunner to pilot."

"Tail gunner to pilot." But there was still no answer. The Liberator was sinking down altitude right into the flak barrage. Dave frantically tried again to get into touch with the control cockpit.

"Tail gunner to pilot. Tail gunner to Colonel. What the hell has happened up there?" By this

time all the men were getting nerved up and were calling on the phone. But George called for order and got it. His voice quieted the situation as he said.

"Navigator to crew. Hold your horses. Hold tight. I'm going to have a look. Maybe something's wrong with the interphone."

By this time Dave could stand it no longer. They were dropping too fast. It could not be any minor trouble, like a broken phone. Three ships had spiralled down into occupied Germany. One ship's engine caught fire and somersaulted down through the sky, flaming, and leaving a grim shred of smoke. Dave pushed out of his turret and smashed through into the after compartment—through to the bomb bay and onto the flight deck. George was hauling himself up from underneath as Dave saw Cohen's body—and beyond were human flesh and bones glaring fresh blood in horror decorated.

There was no time. Dave had little or no emotion. He reached forward expressionless, and took Cohen by the shoulders. He literally threw the dead boy backwards towards the radio compartment. The Colonel was still hugging the wheel. Dave passed Pappy's body back to George. In the space of a few seconds he had wiped the sweetish smelling blood aside, and grabbed the controls.

Dave ordered Bicarb back to the tail guns. "Keep a good look over that formation. Report anything and everything." George came back and pulled the Colonel out of his seat and laid him in the companion-

way. With a quick wave to Dave, George struggled back to his nose position and resumed plotting and navigating.

As soon as he was on the interphone Dave explained what had happened to the crew. He was brief. They were going on to target. Dave would not turn back.

Flak Alley returned to the proper altitude with a closeknit string of hundreds of following aircraft. As the minutes elapsed Dave carried out the Colonel's plan for attack.

As the air column pushed on in past Cologne on the one side, and Duesseldorf on the other, more flak came up but this time it only bordered their safer corridor. Beyond Cologne the Luftwaffe jumped them. The fighters came in by the twenties . . . and by the dozens. The crew were calling over the interphone.

"Top turret to pilot. Enemy fighter nine o'clock high. Over."

"Rah-jer."

"Tail gunner to pilot. Fighter attacking six o'clock. Over."

"Rah-jer."

"Bombardier to pilot. About twenty-five fighters coming in—head on attack. Over."

"Rah-jer. Pilot to top turret—ball turret. Man your guns head on attack. Over."

"Top turret to pilot. Where the hell are those Goddam Mustangs? Over."

"Tail gunner to pilot. Mustangs coming in from astern. Over."

"Rah-ger."

Attack followed attack. Enemy fighter followed enemy fighter. These were the men of the Luftwaffe that the newspapers couldn't see from Fleet Street, or the Press Club in Washington. But they were here.

Flak Alley with her casualties, her weary gunners, and the lone pilot hit the bomb run onto her Big B target. But she was a proud ship that carried her bombs down the run. She was only a few seconds behind schedule despite unforeseen, personal difficulties.

Dave levelled the ship. Recognition okay . . . Identification point okay . . . Fritz readied for "Bombs away." The bomb bay doors rolled back. Fritz jammed his red coloured release back. But at that very moment into the nose of the ship burst ack ack. Their bombs had not yet reached the ground.

Dave called George . . . He called Fritz, on the interphone too. He could not hear anything—no answer. He was alone at the controls. He felt the power of his GI crew, and the impetus by the added responsibility of assuming command not only of Flak Alley but the whole damned outfit. The GIs called over the interphone in an orderly way for, deep in their thoughts, was returned respect for the once labelled "crazy boy." They became disciplined for him, and were "strong" in their manfulness.

Benito had begun humming into the interphone:

“O show me the way to go home,

“I’m tired, and I want to go to bed,

“I had a little drink . . .”

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As the Liberator group circled their field Dave found he could not make his radio work. He fired two green flares from a Verey pistol. The green flares cascaded toward earth. He signalled casualties were aboard with Red flares and put Flak Alley one rung down closer to the airfield.

Dave looked at the earth below him. He saw Anglica’s square topped grey bricked churches. He could spot them anywhere—the houses, the soft wide leafed trees and the villages with the crazy cornered streets—then he was at the end of that black runway. He slid down, stiffened, braked and swung out over the perimeter.

Ike was there on his dispersal area. Dave took one look and then shouted harshly—“Get those damned dead bodies out this plane before she’s jinxed.” No one ever leaves corpses around to curse a Liberator’s future.

The crew followed Dave to Interrogation, confident that he had acted with respect for custom, and for that most important thing—another day.

CHAPTER XXI

DAVE didn't bother to change his clothes. He hadn't shaved. He arrived at the officers' club not many minutes after the interrogation. He dumped two double whiskies into one glass. He drank his whiskey straight. But drinking whiskey straight did not improve Dave's disposition. He wanted to be furious about something so he was encouraging himself into a bad mood by the only means at his disposal.

Dave peeled off a pound note and threw it contemptuously over the bar, in a gesture of officer arrogance. But the bartender was not impressed. The Italian bartender was no ordinary GI, and was fully experienced, having been behind more than one bar in his lifetime. This was no merry beginning for him! The whiskey ration was two doubles per half hour. The GI refused to serve Dave another round. He said he'd have to wait. Wait twenty more minutes. Dave got nasty. And the Italian, who easily could fit himself into accepting the challenge of arrogant people, proceeded to get himself into a complementary nasty mood.

"You Goddam foreigner, you'll serve me all right. What else have you got?"

The Italian flexed his face, hardening his muscles about a fattish jaw-bone.

"Sherry sir-r-r!—Sir-r-r!"

"How much?"

"Three shillings. Do you think you can afford it, sir-r-r ? "

"Shut your face."

"I don't have to take that, you know."

"So what ? "

"So I'll be 'forced' to report you to the executive officer."

"Go ahead and report."

Dave looked up and saw the executive colonel's picture behind the bar. The picture seemed to be frowning down on him. In a moment of impetuosity he ordered a sherry and took action.

"One Sherry."

The bartender shoved a water glass half full of sherry across the bar. Dave seized the glass with his right hand, took two steps back from the bar, and hurled the glass, the sherry, and all, square into the colonel's likeness.

"Take that you dirty bastard." Dave's words were spoken as if they were an epilogue.

The Italian bartender could not control his emotion, for he screamed at the top of his voice, "Get out of here, you crazy lunatic."

"Don't you call me a lunatic. I'll break your ugly face for you yet."

The bartender's face was flushed red. He slipped a hand behind the bar and drew back to heave a Coca-Cola bottle at Dave. At this very crucial moment Ike came into the bar, and seeing the makings of a major fracas at hand took Dave by the arm.

"Take it easy, chum. What goes on here ? "

The bartender attempted to answer. But Ike's authority was far greater than any one else's, in so far as the officers club was concerned. Moreover, there were few on the base that had not learned to respect the flight surgeon's warnings. He had ways of getting what he wanted. Ike turned to the bartender.

"Watch your step, big boy, forget it. Right now I'm ordering two whiskies."

Reluctantly the bartender laid down his anger and obediently did as told. Ike sensed that the other boys were drawing away from Dave. He sensed too, a certain detachment about Dave. A detachment from what he had gone through during the day. As Ike drew Dave aside and they drank, Dave apparently was quite satisfied with his one outburst. He was fish-cold in his conversation. Perhaps this detachment, this coldness, was what was happening to Dave's mind. But what about this outburst? How did that fit into the situation? It might have been that the outburst was a delayed reaction. This was confusing. More likely though, the outburst was a conscious, or unconscious, expression of self-praise more than any realisation of the human aspect of death, of horror, or of the loss of friends.

As Dave and Ike talked, Ike saw there would be no more outbursts. This curious detachment of Dave's from emotion was running through Ike's mind. He could not evaluate it. He could not fathom it. What was this cure that he had worked? Or had it worked?

Certainly, the chemicals, the drugs, had temporarily isolated Dave within his own private world, and had removed the physical barrier onto which his fears had piled up, unsolved. Once physically returned to a normal relaxed state, Dave had worked out for himself his own cure. This part of it, he would probably never know. The physical side of the cure was a small part of the whole. It was more his belief that the chemical could cure him that fortified Dave against the horrors of the day.

At the beginning of last December Dave was obviously abnormally tired. His extreme condition had created tension, and the tense physical being, with its tiny muscles and membranes tied to the spine, had produced emotions in their uglier forms.

There had been waves of temper, of hate, of love, of extremes. As the physical tissues were wrenched from their rightful places along the spine by strain and fatigue, Dave had lost temporary control of himself. Then Ike provided rest, in the true sense of the word. Rest that gave vacation time to even the fraction-sized molecules of the body. This unquestionably had returned the physical components of his tissues to a harmonious reunion. Of course, permanent insanity might have resulted had those tissues not had their chemically produced vacation—had not they been relaxed and allowed to adhere back into the tiny crevices of the spine. For in that distance, shorter than even a thousandth of an inch, lies the possibility of the mind's tangential and

leading an independent life—independent of normality on a deformed road to insanity.

Ike was unable to follow Dave as he had, through the months passed, into a new world—a new heaven—or at least a new state of consciousness that seemed to be such a new place. In reality Dave had acquired a lesser disease in a bargain for his sanity—a blue capsule bargain for sanity. The new disease appeared to be his belief. It was a belief in a belief that was the new disease. Dave believed his cure had toughened him—had made him a rough guy. This belief, seemingly, went out from his brain, taking with it shapes, queer contorted shapes, of a coarser Dave. The old fears had changed their spots.

But the changes which had come about within Dave were confined to his thinking. These things were even hidden from Ike's views. Had not Dave seen the yellow flowers in the field?

For many months the boys had watched Dave suspiciously. What was happening? They didn't realise what had happened. But in that progression of Dave's ideas, expressed by the things he did, he talked about, was the answer. From the days of the sandy beach, through school, to England was part of that answer. Dave had developed with such difficulty that it appeared that he had been jolted through life. Life in England was only the most recent jolt.

Ike, in a way, had been responsible for smoothing out some of the jolts. But in this last phase he had not followed, or he could not follow, Dave's development. Dave was moving away from him too.

Ike was tired. He was tired in the same way that Dave had been tired back last December. The events, as they were happening from hour to hour, from day to day, viciously preyed upon his mind dragging him out of his professional reservation. He could not detach himself as Dave had done. He knew he'd detached himself from Dave's circumstances when he had treated Dave. But Ike remembered that it was only with the greatest difficulty that he had figured out the problems when he first came to England. Now similar problems to the December ones, seemed all too difficult.

Ike's assistant medico joined him and Dave at the bar. The assistant repeated a telephone message.

"Say, Ike. Stevie has been trying to get you on the phone. I was over at the infirmary a little while ago when the call came through. He said something about Claire and him getting married. He said he'd call you back later."

The message bounced about in Ike's ears, raced through an unreceptive mind, and landed smack in his stomach.

Ike steadied himself on the arm of the chair. What was that? Marry, marry whom? Claire? Marry Claire? The significance of the words penetrated slowly.

He knew after they returned from the Shack Hut that he'd lost Claire. He knew he'd failed—failed mentally and physically. He'd simply lacked mental courage at the crucial moment. He reckoned he'd

lost even that belief in himself. He'd given up. Ike felt weakened and sick.

But Dave in contrast merely reacted with a wave of his hand, a shrug, and a few lightly spoken words.

"Well, Ike, that ought to please you. Claire'll make a good spouse to help Stevie sell his stock. After all, if she can listen to you, Ike, she can listen to anybody."

It wasn't Dave's words particularly that made Ike have a sudden feeling of hate for Dave. But he had that feeling, all right. He actually felt he hated Dave. Dave was so prideful of his detachment—so masterful in it.

* * *

It was three days later. Ike sat alone in B.O.Q. dash 201. The Nissen hut that had been once so glorious, so important with its varied membership and clientele, now wore a dejected, sad appearance. Gone were the great-coats, the many suitcases and odd belongings that used to fill the corners and hang significantly from the rusted nails.

Joe had gone to Italy. T.G. had gone to Italy, too. Wheats was down in London gallivanting with Margaret Walker, that new Red Cross girl. Stevie was getting married—getting married to someone he should have had—should have possessed. Pappy, George and Fritz were dead. As dead as anyone can ever be.

Ike's hand barely held a note from operations. His eyes wandered around the page and over it as if trying to avoid something. He could not accept

the writing. But he knew those words. He recognized the letters more than he did the meaning of the words. He found himself reading letters, just the symbols. But even the letters created the scene in which Dave was now reported, "*Missing in Action.*"

Ike realised that he was starting a worry-cycle, as his patient had begun so many months ago. He felt tied closely to Dave. Closer than he had ever felt before. But Dave was further away. Dave was dead, gone. He would not come back. He would not see Dave again. His work was useless. Or, at least, it seemed useless. Why should he have bothered anyway? What future was there? Little, he thought. And then thoughts followed him in every direction as his mind moved one way, and then the other, *those thoughts* followed him. Dave was gone, dead, he would not return. He was *Missing in Action*.

Suddenly the hut was filled with dozens of people. Half-human forms—the forms of the oppressed ghosts of his boys, his friends. He could hear Joe playing his banjo. He was strumming that very lovely folk-song. That song he knew so well. It was Joe's Czechoslovakian folk-song. There were no beginnings or endings, of time. There was just that faint music and the treading up and down of those ghosts. They would not talk to him.

Into this spiritual, supernatural atmosphere Wa-Wa burst with a cablegram. Wa-Wa was as happy as he had ever been in his life. He was smiling, proud, and in the very best of spirits. He looked at Captain

Ike in his chair. Ike only just recognized Wa-Wa's presence. He did not see the glossy new chevrons on Wa-Wa's shoulders. The young Indian pointed first one shoulder and then the other at him hoping to show off his promotion. Wa-Wa had become a sergeant at last, and was reflecting on how to bring attention to his chevrons. But he decided he'd better come back later. Wa-Wa was assuming the fatherly responsibility generally accorded to sergeants. He rubbed his hand over his sign of promotion, and ducked out of the door.

Ike spread the cable over his knees. He could hardly draw his mind down to that sheet of paper, or force his eyes to carry back a message.

The cable was from Dave's father. He wanted Ike to know that he would be eternally grateful for what he, Ike, had done for his son. He had given the father something to live for, the cable said, "to live for."

Even the oppressed ghosts left him. Left Ike in an atmosphere of desolation. Ike's mind framed pictures of waste of desert—human desert. All visible life had disappeared for him with the going of the boys. Ike was strengthless.

He tried to rise to go into the sleeping room but fell off the chair onto his knees. It seemed as if it took hours to move from that chair to the bureau. Automatically he reached for that one thing that might replace strength, replace what he had lost, save him from destroying himself.

Ike swallowed two blue capsules and stared into the bureau. He could feel his feet shrinking within

his shoes—his body shrinking from his clothes. Inside of his eyelids that were heavily closed, Ike could see the blueness of a rising haze—the same rising haze as Dave had seen many months before.

Ike was hungry, and the blueness gave food. He seemed to reach for the food, the fruit, a new state of laziness, of satisfactory comfort. As he thought he'd fulfilled material desires he saw himself back as a boy in short pants—blue pants, back in his hometown in Ohio. He was fishing in a brook just outside his home town. Then he played baseball. He went to college. He relived his internship. How easy it all seemed now. How foolish was all his worrying. Everything worked out in retrospect as more blueness explained away each phase, each argument, each difficulty that had been. Then he was in Rapid City with family, friends, old friends, and new friends. There was England. The little things were the nicest and most easily remembered; the bigger things seemed smaller in comparison. Then he saw Pappy's Flak Alley land on a black runway. The ship stopped. He saw Dave at the controls. The dead were bloodless. Then he saw for the first time there were millions of tiny common flowers on the airfield, yellow ones, white ones that grew—grew in their unkempt field. Ike, exhausted, was more acquainted with his thoughts.

He was rediscovering his thoughts and they seemed new. He rummaged his pockets for notebook and pencil, then bent over the bureau writing rapidly. He wrote his own case history. His renewed

acquaintance with himself was providing more adequate reasons for his "lucky" cure of Dave.

Unfolding onto the paper was the solution of why Dave had gone partially insane while on active duty flying with the Air Force. Strangely Dave's case had little to do with flying. There was hardly any difference between Dave's case and his own. The main difference was that he was a doctor and he was diagnosing his feelings.

Ike's state of mind had in its desperateness and demoralization created a sub-conscious clarity of perception while his thoughts were edged with hopes of personal survival. Pride in his discovery aided his hands as they wrote furiously and flipped the pages of the notebook. Half insane, wet with sweat that rolled down off him, the motivation of habit and the professional years directed his technical explanation. His eyes lost their haziness and his hands became strong. He rejoiced that his power was returning, perhaps to produce something great. Ike rose in his physical posture and enveloped himself with a new reason for existence.

He had stepped aside to become a spectator of himself.

Minutes lapsed into hours as he wrote on. Finally he lifted from the pages of notes and leaned back exhausted. He drew out a cigarette and carefully lit, and inhaled, testing his vigour. 'Ike could feel the sensations of mastery that was remaking his flesh into a man. He got up and walked to his cot. He could sleep now.

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